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The
MOFFATT
NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

Based on *The New Translation* by the
REV. PROFESSOR JAMES MOFFATT, D.D.
and under his Editorship

THE EPISTLES OF PAUL
TO THE COLOSSIANS, TO PHILEMON AND TO THE EPHESIANS

The Moffatt New Testament Commentary

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THE
EPISTLES OF PAUL
TO THE COLOSSIANS, TO PHILEMON AND TO THE EPHESIANS

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BY

E. F. SCOTT

D.D.

Union Theological Seminary,
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EDITOR'S PREFACE

MOFFATT'S NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

THE aim of this commentary is to bring out the religious meaning and message of the New Testament writings. To do this, it is needful to explain what they originally meant for the communities to which they were addressed in the first century, and this involves literary and historical criticism ; otherwise, our reading becomes unintelligent. But the New Testament was the literature of the early church, written out of faith and for faith, and no study of it is intelligent unless this aim is kept in mind. It is literature written for a religious purpose. 'These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.' This is the real object of the New Testament, that Christians might believe it better, in the light of contemporary life with its intellectual and moral problems. So with any commentary upon it. Everything ought to be subordinated to the aim of elucidating the religious content, of shewing how the faith was held in such and such a way by the first Christians, and of making clear what that faith was and is.

The idea of the commentary arose from a repeated demand to have my New Testament translation explained ; which accounts for the fact that this translation has been adopted as a convenient basis for the commentary. But the contributors have been left free to take their own way. If they interpret the text differently, they have been at liberty to say so. Only, as a translation is in itself a partial commentary, it has often saved space to print the commentary and start from it.

As everyman has not Greek, the commentary has been written, as far as possible, for the Greekless. But it is based upon a first-hand study of the Greek original and readers may rest assured that it represents a close reproduction of the original writers' meaning, or at anyrate of what we consider that to have been. Our common aim has been to enable everyman to-day to sit where these first Christians sat, to feel the impetus and inspiration of the Christian faith as it dawned upon the minds of the communities in the first century, and thereby to realize more vividly how new and lasting is the message which prompted these New Testament writings to take shape as they did. Sometimes people inside as well as outside the church make mistakes about the New Testament. They think it means this or that, whereas its words frequently mean something very different from what traditional associations suggest. The saving thing is to let the New Testament speak for itself. This is our desire and plan in the present commentary, to place each writing or group of writings in its original setting and allow their words to come home thus to the imagination and conscience of everyman to-day.

The general form of the commentary is to provide a running comment on the text, instead of one broken up into separate verses. But within these limits, each contributor has been left free. Thus, to comment on a gospel requires a method which is not precisely the same as that necessitated by commenting on an epistle. Still, the variety of treatment ought not to interfere with the uniformity of aim and form. Our principle has been that nothing mattered, so long as the reader could understand what he was reading in the text of the New Testament.

JAMES MOFFATT.

PREFACE

Many excellent commentaries on Colossians and Ephesians have appeared within recent years, and the present author has made ample use of all of them. He is particularly indebted (as all commentators on these Epistles must be) to Lightfoot, Dibelius, Ewald, and Robinson. At the same time he has found himself compelled to differ from all these expositors on many important points both of exegesis and of general interpretation. He regrets that he had finished his work before the appearance of Prof. G. S. Duncan's very able book *St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry*, in which the theory of the Ephesian origin of the Epistles is supported by a number of new arguments. He is still of opinion, however, that the epistles of the Captivity can only have been written at Rome. On the other great critical problem of the Pauline authorship of Ephesians he also holds to the position which was never questioned until modern days. This is due, he hopes, not to any stubborn conservative bias, but simply to the conviction, forced on him after much careful thought, that on this matter the conservatives are right.

E. F. Scott.

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THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE COLOSSIANS

INTRODUCTION

(1) THE EPISTLES OF THE CAPTIVITY

THE epistle to Colossians belongs to a group of seven letters which purport to have been written by Paul in captivity: Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus. The three last-named (the so-called Pastoral epistles) can hardly in their present form be authentic, and those who still claim them as Pauline are compelled to assign them to a period of Paul's life of which we cannot pretend to know anything. There thus remain four epistles, and within this group it is at once evident that Philippians stands apart from the others. It is addressed to readers in a separate locality, and was written at a different time, when the apostle's thoughts were running in a different direction. Between Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon there is a relation so close that they need all to be taken together. Colossians and Philemon are indeed distinct in character: one is addressed to a church, and deals with large issues of faith and conduct, while the other is a private note on a personal matter. Both, however, were evidently written at the same time, and were sent to the same town by the hands of the same messenger. Colossians and Ephesians are also very closely related. Although they differ in purpose they reflect the same mood of thought and continually repeat the same ideas in much the same words. This very resemblance of the two epistles has sometimes been made a ground of doubting whether one of them can be genuine. This question will fall to be considered in the introduction to Ephesians.

(2) PLACE OF ORIGIN

The letters were written when Paul was in prison, and we naturally think of the long Roman imprisonment, when he was awaiting trial in the emperor's court. Until recently it was taken for granted that the four epistles belong to this latest period in Paul's career. We know, however, that he suffered other imprisonments. For two years he was detained at Caesarea, before his voyage to Rome. At an earlier time he passed through terrible dangers, no doubt including imprisonment, at Ephesus. The book of Acts has nothing to tell us of this grave crisis, but he himself alludes to it in a number of passages (cf. 1 Cor. 15 : 32, 2 Cor. 1 : 8–10, Rom. 16 : 3, 4). Some modern scholars have held that the letters must be assigned to one of those earlier captivities, and the case in favour of this view has been ably presented in the Commentary on *Philippians* in this series.[1]

The matter is so important that the main arguments may be repeated: (1) Paul writes in the name of himself and Timothy, his companion during the third missionary journey. (2) He mentions a number of men who are with him, and who were all associated with that earlier period. (3) He refers to his future plans, taking for granted that when he is set at liberty he will resume work in Asia, while before going to Rome he had definitely closed his mission in the East. (4) He is in close and frequent communication with Macedonia and Asia Minor, and this would hardly have been possible in Rome, which was far more distant from those countries, under ancient conditions of travel, than America now is from Europe. (5) The fugitive slave Onesimus, on whose behalf the letter to Philemon is written, could not have made his way from Colossae to Rome, and Paul could not have sent him back such a distance. Several of these arguments would exclude the Caesarean as well as the Roman imprisonment. At Caesarea, for instance, when Paul's thoughts were all turning towards Rome and the West, we cannot conceive of him as planning an immediate return to Asia.

So the great majority of scholars who assign the letters to an earlier imprisonment are in favour of Ephesus. At Ephesus Paul had Timothy with him, he was surrounded by

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[1] The fullest discussion of the whole subject will be found in Prof. G. S. Duncan's recent book, *St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry*. Prof. Duncan is strongly in favour of the view that the epistles were written at Ephesus.

Asian Christians, his plans as yet were limited to the East, he was at easy distance from Philippi and Colossae, he would readily fall in with Onesimus, who had fled from a city only a hundred miles away. Due weight must certainly be allowed to all these arguments, but they leave out of account the unique position of Rome, the great centre to which everything in that ancient world was attracted. At Rome Paul might easily find himself in company with many of his old friends. Runaway slaves notoriously made for the vast city, where they were safer from detection than anywhere else. Moreover, we have no evidence of any prolonged imprisonment of Paul at Ephesus. To allow for the composition of these letters we need to postulate a captivity of some duration. Paul finds himself at leisure to receive reports and consider them carefully and write elaborate answers, full of weighty thought. All his references to the trouble at Ephesus appear to imply a short, acute crisis. His imprisonment would be similar to that which he suffered at Philippi, where he was thrown into a cell with his feet in the stocks ; and under such conditions he would have little inclination or opportunity for theological discussion.

In Rome, on the other hand, he lived in his own hired house, his friends had free access to him, time lay heavy on his hands, and he would welcome the chance of making himself useful by means of letters. We have to note also his allusions to the ' Praetorium ' and to ' Caesar's household,' which point most naturally to Rome. There seems to be no sufficient reason for abandoning the generally accepted view that the epistles date from the period of the Roman captivity.

(3) THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE

Colossae was one of three cities in the Lycus valley, a large and fertile plain encircled by mountains which lies in the interior of Asia Minor, about a hundred miles east of Ephesus. The region has always been famous for a number of natural phenomena—a petrified waterfall, sulphur springs, a steaming cavern—which are due to volcanic agencies. It is now almost completely deserted, but in Paul's day was one of the wealthiest and most populous districts of the East. The three cities in the valley—Colossae, Laodicea, Hierapolis—were situated within a few miles of one another. Colossae was the smallest of the three, but was the original settlement, and was already ancient when Xenophon passed through it on the famous march. In the year A.D. 60 or 61 the cities were devastated by an earthquake, with terrible loss of life. It is remarkable that Paul makes no allusion to this calamity, which must have happened very near the time when the letter was written, and which made a deep impression on the whole empire. His silence has been made an argument for attributing the letter to the Ephesian period, but the precise date of the earthquake is uncertain. It may have been later than the composition of the letter, even when we assume that Paul wrote from Rome.

He expressly says (Col. 2 : 1—*for you and for those at Laodicea, for all who have never seen my face*) that he had not personally visited the cities in the Lycus valley. In each of them, however, a church had been founded by the labours of Epaphras, who was probably one of Paul's Ephesian converts. He had a further connexion with Colossae through Philemon, with whom he had become well acquainted ; and during his imprisonment he had formed a special intimacy with another Colossian, the slave Onesimus. In view of these associations, and also because it was an offshoot of his own mission at Ephesus, Paul had always felt a peculiar interest in the Colossian church. His letter was written after a meeting with Epaphras, and most likely at his request. Epaphras had recently arrived at Rome, perhaps for the express purpose of visiting Paul, perhaps on some business connected with his mission (*his exertions on your behalf and on behalf of those at Laodicea and Hierapolis*, Col. 4 : 13). He had spoken in the warmest terms of the Colossian Christians, but had also told of certain strange doctrines which were gaining ground, and which he himself had apparently found it difficult to answer. Paul felt the matter to be so important that he resolved to write. His letter turns wholly on the question of the heresy, except that towards the end it deals with the duties of husbands and wives, children and parents, masters and servants. This also may be explained from the circumstances which had drawn Paul's attention at this time to Colossae. His interest in Philemon's slave Onesimus had set him thinking on the whole matter of domestic relations, and he takes occasion to discuss this practical question, along with the purely doctrinal one.

(4) THE COLOSSIAN HERESY

The epistle is thus concerned with a peculiar type of false teaching which had arisen at Colossae. Nothing is known of this heresy except from Paul's references to it in the course of the letter, and the nature of it has always been one of the vexed problems of New Testament inquiry. Attempts have been made to identify it with one or another of the strange beliefs which are known to have been current in the latter half of the first century. Some scholars (e.g. Lightfoot) have traced it to the Jewish sect of the Essenes, which may have found adherents among the Jewish settlers in the Lycus valley. Others have seen in it close affinities with the ideas of Cerinthus, one of the earliest of the Gnostics who, according to tradition, came into conflict with John at Ephesus. These efforts to attach a particular label to the heresy may all be regarded as futile.

Asia Minor, during the first century, was full of obscure religious movements, and it is highly improbable that the Colossian sect was one of the two or three which happen to be known to us. Moreover, it seems to have been confined to the one locality. We can hardly infer from Paul's account that it had even spread to the two neighbouring churches ; he seems to speak of it as quite peculiar to Colossae. In all periods of the Church there have been localized heresies, and they are not unknown to-day. Sometimes they come to extend from their original centre over a wide area ; sometimes they struggle on and die where they were born. In itself the Colossian heresy was probably no more than one of those abortive movements, but there are several points about it, besides the fact that it was answered by Paul, which make it of special interest.

For one thing, it presents a double aspect, Jewish and Pagan. These two forms of religion refused, for the most part, to blend with each other. The Jewish legalists with whom Paul had to contend at an earlier time held rigidly aloof from all contamination with Gentile ideas and customs. The semi-Pagan Gnostics, who became such a menace at the end of the first century, took up a strongly anti-Jewish attitude, so much so that they discarded the Old Testament as the law of an inferior, tyrannical God. The Colossian teachers, as we gather from Paul's allusions, tried to combine the two types of belief. On the one hand they pushed to an extreme the demands of the Jewish code—observance of festivals, keeping of the Sabbath, avoidance of things unclean. On the other hand they laid stress on mysterious rites and ascetic discipline, they required that angels should be worshipped, they called their doctrine a *theosophy* or 'philosophy,' and employed a jargon which was borrowed from the Pagan cults. This fusion of Judaism and Paganism is undoubtedly puzzling.

Much more interesting and important is the relation of the heresy to the spiritual conditions of that age in which Christianity appeared. A type of belief may be purely local, but it always reflects some widespread mode of thinking. The fanatical sects which sprang up in isolated districts during the Middle Ages merely carried to the point of extravagance the common ideas of the time, and in many ways illustrate them better than the official creeds. In the same manner the movement at Colossae throws light on the religious situation which Paul and his fellow-missionaries had to face. For more than a generation three factors had been working together to produce a spiritual atmosphere of a unique kind: (1) The ancient forms of religion had broken down. Not only had intelligent men ceased to believe in them, but they were bound up with political conditions which no longer existed. The cult of the gods and goddesses had grown out of the life of the free city-states, and these had now been absorbed in the one great empire. (2) Within this empire the different countries had been drawn close together. Above all, the East and the West had become united, and the Oriental cults had established themselves everywhere and had profoundly modified the old beliefs and customs. (3) Greek philosophy had come to exercise a dominant influence on all higher thinking. Religion sought to reconcile itself with philosophical speculation, and philosophy at the same time made use of terms and conceptions borrowed from religion.

The outcome of these various conditions was the phenomenon known as 'Syncretism'—the blending of all known religions with one another and with the ideas of philosophy. Inevitably the fusion assumed countless forms. It was an age of religious experiment. In the absence of any generally recognized religion the field was open for every kind of strange belief. All over the empire men were at work, trying to create new religions out of different combinations of the old. These men were sometimes profound thinkers, sometimes visionaries, or crazy enthusiasts, or mere impostors. It is evident that from the first many of these irresponsible teachers were strongly attracted to Christianity. They perceived that in this new message there were elements of the highest value, and were eager to exploit it in the interest of their own beliefs. If the missionaries had been willing to compromise they would no doubt have been able, almost from the beginning, to secure a central place for Christ in the syncretistic systems. But they refused to compromise. They took up the position, and held to it firmly through the struggles of the next two centuries, that Christ alone must be the object of faith.

The Colossian heresy, therefore, is to be regarded as one of the many attempts to make Christianity an element in some form of composite religion. Teachers at Colossae were beginning to do what the Gnostics sought to do later on a more ambitious scale. They took fragments of the Christian message and tried to fit them into a structure which was mainly composed of Pagan mythology and metaphysic. In this Colossian experiment a place was also given to Jewish contributions. This was certainly exceptional, but may be explained from the special conditions of the Lycus valley. Jews, in that neighbourhood, formed a considerable part of the population, and the new teachers, bent on collecting ideas from every quarter, could not overlook the suggestions offered them by Judaism. It may indeed have been men of Jewish birth and upbringing who were mainly responsible for the new type of doctrine. Whoever they were the heretics apparently called themselves Christians and worked within the Church, trying to persuade their fellow-members that what they taught was a richer, more satisfying Christianity. We need not doubt that in this claim they were sincere. They believed that while holding all that was essential in the Christian faith they also allowed room for valuable elements from other sources. It was this that made them dangerous. They were able to maintain that what they had to offer was an improved Christianity. They had added to the gospel all that was best in Judaism and Paganism.

(5) Paul's Answer to the False Teaching

The Colossian epistle reminds us, to some extent, of the epistle to Galatians, which Paul had written a number of years before. There also he is concerned with the threatened perversion of one of his churches by a wrong form of teaching. The two epistles, however, are quite different in their tone and character. In Galatians Paul writes throughout with strong feeling. He vehemently denounces the advocates of the Law and is indignant with the Galatians for listening to them. In Colossians he is kind and persuasive. He approaches the subject of dispute by slow degrees, after assuring his readers of his fullest confidence in their loyalty. It may be that he does not care to speak bluntly to this community which he has never visited and over which he has no direct control. It may be that the mischief when he wrote had not proceeded very far, and that he is anxious not to blame the whole Church for the error of a few. We cannot but feel, moreover, that while he deplored the heresy he was aware that it had raised genuine difficulties which had to be seriously considered. No purpose could be served by merely denouncing these false teachers. They had offered a criticism of the gospel which needed to be answered, and Paul was grateful for the opportunity they gave him. We know that within a generation the Gnostic peril, which had first loomed up in that obscure local heresy, was to overshadow the whole Church. It is a remarkable evidence of Paul's wisdom and foresight that he perceived the danger from the very outset. Not only so, but in this epistle he indicated the line of argument by which the Gnostic criticisms could be effectually met.

The position of the heretics appears to have been that the work of Christ was by itself imperfect. Christ had been the deliverer from sin, but man is subject to a bondage of which moral evil is only one aspect out of many. For that part, moral evil itself arises from the larger conditions in which man's life is involved. As a creature of earth man belongs to the material creation. His spiritual nature is called on to assert itself in the face of vast cosmical forces which are bent on excluding him from that higher life to which he aspires. So before he can be morally redeemed he must be secured against those hostile powers which keep him imprisoned in the lower material world.

For this purpose the work of Christ must be supplemented by other agencies. By an ascetic discipline men must free themselves, as far as possible, from the pollution of matter. By mysterious rites they must be able to counter those secret influences which are always working for their destruction. Above all, they must enlist on their behalf supernatural beings who will protect them from those other beings who hold sway in the material creation. Along with the faith in Christ there must be this *cult of angels*, without whose co-operation the help of Christ is unavailing. The heretics expressed themselves in the mythological language of their time, and conceived of salvation in terms of a conflict between personal agencies—those which represented the spiritual and those which ruled in the material world. But the issue they raised was one which forces itself on Christian thought in all ages and which has never been more urgent than in our own day. How can the gospel be reconciled with the facts of this universe of which we form a part ? Over against the tremendous visible forces amidst which we find ourselves, what is the value of the work of Christ ?

It is this problem with which Paul deals in Colossians, and still more fully in the companion epistle to Ephesians; and for this reason the two epistles form a permanent contribution to Christian thought. In Ephesians he concerns himself with the problem in its larger aspects; in Colossians he meets that particular group of heretics on their own ground. His answer resolves itself into this—that Christ is absolutely pre-eminent. He must not be regarded as one power out of many, for he includes in himself all other powers. Not only is he supreme over all angels, but they owe to him their very existence, and are no less dependent on him than men themselves. In him we have the ultimate reality, so that his work for us is all-sufficient. For the purpose of this argument Paul avails himself of a doctrine which was henceforth to play a cardinal part in Christian theology, but of which he makes little use in his earlier writings. He identifies Christ with the Logos, which according to the Alexandrian philosophy was the principle of creation, the intermediary between God and the world.

The passage in which Paul sets forth the Logos nature of Christ (Col. 1 : 15–17) has to some scholars appeared so alien to Pauline thought that they would strike it out of the epistle as a later insertion, but it is integral to the whole argument and indeed supplies its philosophical groundwork. Certainly nowhere else does Paul so explicitly state the position which was later to be developed by the Fourth evangelist. Even in the early epistles, however, we can see him feeling his way towards this position (cf. 1 Cor. 8 : 6). If he never made it central before Colossians the reason doubtless was that he had never before had to face a problem to which it seemed to offer the solution. He had now to examine the place of Christ with reference not only to man's salvation but to the material universe, and was forced back upon this doctrine which he had previously thought of as merely speculative. Paul's argument, however, though it is attached to a metaphysical theory, is essentially religious. The true significance of it and its bearing on the permanent Christian message will fall to be discussed in the introduction to the commentary on Ephesians.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE COLOSSIANS

THE OPENING SALUTATION (1 : 1, 2) i.

Paul, by God's will an apostle of Christ Jesus, and brother 1
Timotheus, to the consecrated and faithful brothers in 2
Christ at Colossae: grace and peace to you from God
our Father.

i.

Greek letters began with a regular formula, 'A to B sends 1
greeting.' Paul follows this rule in his epistles, but expands each part of the greeting, and weaves it in with Christian ideas. It is his custom, too, to associate himself with a colleague who happens to be with him at the time. The early missionaries seem to have adopted the practice of working in pairs, perhaps in accordance with Jesus' own injunction when he sent out the first disciples by two and two (Mark 6 : 7). Paul wishes his letters to carry the same authority as would attach to a personal visit, and for this reason takes care to mention his companion along with himself. In this epistle he refers to Timothy only in the salutation, and then proceeds to write in his own person. It may be understood, however, that Timothy read and endorsed the letter. According to his custom Paul speaks of himself as an **apostle,** to mark at the very outset the authority by which he addresses his readers. Not only is he an apostle, but he holds his office **by God's will.** This claim must be interpreted in the light of the opening chapter of Galatians. Paul's opponents had sought to weaken his authority by insisting that while he called himself an apostle he was not on the same footing as the immediate disciples. Any right he had to teach the gospel was derived from them, and wherever he differed from them he must be wrong. His answer was that his commission, just as much as theirs, was from God.

And as he declares himself a true apostle so he recognizes 2 the Colossians as a genuine branch of the Church. They are **consecrated** (saints), in the sense that they had received the divine calling, and were set apart from the world. Not only so, but they were **faithful**—a word which carries the double meaning that they believed in Christ and were stedfast in their profession. To this Paul adds his favourite formula **in Christ**, suggesting the idea of mystical fellowship. Sometimes this idea is fully emphasized ; sometimes the phrase is used more generally. It must be remembered that the name ' Christian ' was still a somewhat contemptuous one, applied to the believers by the heathen. Paul avoids it, and yet conveys its meaning by his term ' in Christ.' By something like a play on words he changes the conventional Greek salutation into a Christian one. Instead of ' joy ' he wishes **grace** to his readers ; the same Greek word expresses both ideas, and Paul uses it in the larger, religious sense. To the customary Greek formula he adds the Oriental one of **peace** (' salaam '), and to this also he gives a Christian implication. We are reminded of Jesus' farewell in John 14 : 27, *Peace I leave to you, not as the world gives its ' Peace,'* where the meaning is, ' the peace I offer is a real peace, not the conventional " goodbye." '

THANKSGIVING (1 : 3–8)

3 We always thank the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
4 when we pray for you, since we have heard of your faith
in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints, due to the
5 hope which is laid up for you in heaven. You heard of
6 this hope originally in the message of the Truth, in that
gospel which has reached you as it spreads over all the
world with fruit and increase. Such has been your life
from the day you learned to know what God's grace
7 really is. You got that lesson from our beloved fellow-
servant Epaphras, a minister of Christ who is faithful to
8 your interests ; and it is he who has informed us of your
love in the Spirit.

In this section also Paul follows the ordinary structure of

a Greek letter. After the salutation it was customary to throw in a few words of thanksgiving for the welfare of the person addressed, and of prayer that it might be continued. This was generally done in a single stereotyped sentence, but Paul almost always makes a great deal of this part of the letter, and tries to frame it in such a way that it leads up naturally to his main theme. In letters like his, where the religious motive is everything, the thanksgiving ceases to be a mere formal introduction. It comes from the heart and often sums up the whole purpose which the writer has in
mind. So Paul begins by rendering thanks **to the God and** 3
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He implies that our access to God is through Christ. Because Christ knew Him as Father we can approach Him with like confidence. This was strikingly expressed in the early Christian practice of using the double name 'Abba, Father'—the word, which Jesus had employed when he prayed in his own language, being prefixed to the ordinary Greek word.

Paul tells the Colossians that he had thus thanked God on
their behalf ever since he had **heard** (for he had never visited 4
them personally) of their **faith in Christ Jesus,** their **love** to all their fellow Christians, and the **hope** which sustained them. This triad of faith, hope, love, is familiar to everyone from 1 Cor. 13, where it is declared that these three abide, while all else is transitory. In many other passages, however, we find the apostle's mind running on the same three excellences. Wherever one of them is mentioned we may look, somewhere close at hand, for a reference to the two others. So far as can be discovered it was Paul himself who first analysed the Christian life into these three main elements. The present passage is important as defining what he meant by them. Faith is directed to Christ, love to the brethren, hope to the coming salvation. This object of hope is described as **laid up,** by which is implied: (1) that it is still in the future; (2) that its full nature is still hidden; (3) that it is absolutely secure.
They **heard of it originally,** in the days when they were 5
first converted, and the news came to them **in the message of the Truth, in the gospel.** Paul may here be contrasting

the genuine message with those heretical perversions which he is presently to condemn, but more likely he is seeking to emphasize the certainty of the hope.

In the gospel which tells of it we receive the absolute truth.
6 This gospel had come to the Colossians as to **all the world.** At the time when Paul wrote this was a wild exaggeration, for the Church as yet consisted of tiny handfuls of people, almost unnoticed in the great empire which itself was only a fraction of the **world.** But Paul sees in these the promise of a world-wide community, and takes care here, as elsewhere (e.g. Rom. 1 : 13, 1 Thess. 1 : 8 f.), to impress on his readers that they form part of this great whole. His words have a special point in view of those divisive teachings with which he is presently to deal. Not only has the gospel spread everywhere, but it **spreads with fruit,** keeps bearing fruit, like an ever-growing tree, and it has been abundantly fruitful among the Colossians, who **know what God's grace really** (in truth) **is.** The gospel all centred for Paul on the idea of divine grace, and he is confident that his readers have apprehended this grace in no theoretical fashion but as a living reality.

7 He closes his thanksgiving with a tribute to Epaphras through whom the gospel had come to Colossae. In Epaphras he recognizes a **fellow-servant,** a true comrade in the work of Christ, and declares that like a good steward he has been **faithful** in his office. Instead of **to your interests** (' for you '—A.V.), however, we ought almost certainly to read ' on our behalf.' Paul wishes to acknowledge his debt to Epaphras, who has done the work which would naturally have fallen to his own share during his mission
8 at Ephesus. As Paul's substitute Epaphras had now brought in his report, telling how the Colossian Christians were manifesting **love in the Spirit.** We know from 1 Corinthians 13 that Paul thought of love as the greatest of all the spiritual gifts, and he rejoices that his readers were in possession of this gift. Epaphras had told him other things about them, not so favourable ; but for the present he only dwells on the bright features in the report.

A PRAYER, MERGING IN AN ACCOUNT OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST (1 : 9–14)

**Hence, from the day we heard of it, we have never ceased to 9
pray for you, asking God to fill you with the knowledge
of his will in all spiritual wisdom and insight, so that 10
you may lead a life that is worthy of the Lord and give
him entire satisfaction. May you be fruitful and increase
in the doing of all good, as you thus know God! May 11
his glorious might nerve you with full power to endure
and to be patient cheerfully, whatever comes, thanking 12
the Father who has qualified us to share the lot of the
saints in the Light, rescuing us from the power of the 13
Darkness and transferring us to the realm of his beloved
Son! In him we enjoy our redemption, that is, the 14
forgiveness of sins.**

Because of all the Christian promise they have shewn 9
(**hence**) Paul assures them that he not only gives thanks but prays for them unceasingly. In describing what he prays for he begins to touch gently on his complaint against the Colossians—that with all their devotion they have failed in right knowledge, mistaking windy speculations for a deeper wisdom. He desires that they should have a true insight into God's will **in all spiritual wisdom and insight** (understanding). It is hardly possible to distinguish between these two kinds of knowing, and the emphasis, in any case, falls on the word 'spiritual,' which qualifies both of them. In 1 Cor. 2 : 13 Paul tells that he had tried to speak 'not as human wisdom teaches, but as the holy Spirit teaches.' The Colossians had been carried away by mere human wisdom and had missed the guidance of the Spirit. He warns them that right knowledge is necessary to right conduct. By their high calling as Christians they had come
under an obligation to **lead a life that is worthy of the Lord,** so 10
as to please or satisfy God entirely in every kind of good work.

This growth in practical goodness and their growth in true knowledge will react on one another, and both of them are
only made possible by the help of a higher power. This 11

is described as a **glorious might** or power. 'Glory' in the New Testament is the light in which God dwells, and which radiates out from Him. Thus it is applied to anything that is of divine nature—here to that inward power which the believer knows to be not his own. It manifests itself chiefly in the patience which bears up under all trials and which is not a dull Stoical endurance, but is accompanied with joy (**cheerfully**), since the believer can be confident that all his
12 trials are leading to some great end. Thus for Paul thanksgiving is the characteristic mark of the Christian life. The Christian has always before him a splendid hope, and can feel certain that everything which happens to him is serving in some way to realize it.

In these epistles of Colossians and Ephesians we are struck by the continual recurrence of the note of thanksgiving. Paul takes it for granted that the Christian mood is one of unfailing thankfulness to God, **who has qualified us to share the lot of the saints in the Light.** The heavenly world is pictured as a realm of light, in which the people of Christ will have a place allotted or set apart for them, and the mention of it brings Paul to his central theme—the all-sufficiency of Christ through whom we have this inheritance. The world of light for which God has destined us stands
13 out against the domain or **power of the Darkness** into which
14 men were born. From this darkness, ruled over by hostile powers, God delivered us, **rescuing us and transferring us to the realm of his beloved Son!** It is implied that although the final blessedness lies in the future we have already in some measure won our freedom. We have been removed from a world which is subject to evil forces into one which has Christ for its King, so that now we submit ourselves to no authority but his. Paul associates this great transition with the moment of baptism, when the convert dies to his old life and obtains remission of sins.

When Paul speaks in this passage of a realm of **Light** and a realm of **Darkness**, he is using terms which to his mind are more than figurative. The belief was common in his time that the world in which we find ourselves owed its existence to some kind of error. Certain angelic beings had fallen out of the higher world or had been expelled from it, and had produced this material world in which they continue to hold sway. They are identified in the Gnostic systems with the spirits who are enthroned in the planets. So Paul thinks of men as subject by nature to those powers who are called in Eph. 6 : 12 *the potentates of the dark present,* the world-rulers of this darkness. He conceives of Christ as overcoming them by his death and so rescuing men from their tyranny. The argument that follows turns on this idea.

According to the false teachers at Colossae it was necessary to conciliate the angelic powers who rule over the world, or to win to our side other powers who will protect us from them. Paul maintains that as Christ's people we have escaped from all lower jurisdiction. Christ is above all angels; he has conquered all other powers, and since we belong to him we are free. Perhaps we can best understand Paul's meaning when we translate his idea out of the terms of ancient mythology into those of modern thinking. We speak now, not of angelic powers throned in the planets, but of a world of mechanical law, in the clutches of which we are helpless. Our life is all determined for us by heredity, environment, natural and social and economic forces, and the most we can do is to adjust ourselves as best we can to these conditions. To such a philosophy Paul would answer, as he answered the teachers at Colossae, that we have access to a world of freedom. God has delivered us out of the lower, mechanical sphere and placed us in the Kingdom of His Son.

THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST (1 : 15–17)

He is the likeness of the unseen God, born first before all the 15
creation—for it was by him that all things were created 16
both in heaven and on earth, both the seen and the unseen,
including Thrones, angelic Lords, celestial Powers and
Rulers; all things have been created by him and for
him; he is prior to all and all coheres in him. 17

This is the most remarkable passage in the epistle, and has given rise to much discussion, critical and theological.

The foregoing verses have led up to the cardinal truth that salvation depends on Christ alone, so that no angelic mediators are necessary. Now it is shewn that the all-sufficiency of Christ is apparent when once we realize his unique place in the universe. The passage represents a loftier conception of Christ's Person than is found anywhere else in the writings of Paul, and comes very near to the view set forth in the prologue to the Fourth Gospel. For this reason some critics have questioned its authenticity. Elsewhere in his epistles Paul works with Jewish Messianic ideas, supplemented by a conception of Jesus as ' Lord,' which may have been partly suggested by the Oriental religions. Here he appears to construe the Person of Christ by the Alexandrian doctrine of the Logos—the Word who existed from the beginning within the being of God, and through whom God effected His work of creation. It is argued that this identification of Christ with the Logos was not made until a time subsequent to Paul, and that the passage before us must have been inserted by some later writer. We do not know, however, when the Logos doctrine was first adopted. It is certain that the Church came very early into contact with Alexandrian thought through teachers like Apollos, who was one of Paul's fellow-workers. For that part Paul may have become acquainted with the general lines of Alexandrian thinking even before his conversion.

Indications are not wanting in the earlier epistles that he had begun to think of Christ in terms of Logos theory (e.g. 1 Cor. 8 : 6), and in his later years his mind may have moved more decidedly in this direction. One fact also has to be remembered—that the Colossian heresy confronted him with a new problem. Hitherto his task had been to prove the value of Christ for salvation, while in the face of this new teaching he had to affirm the cosmical significance of Christ. The position of the heretics was that there were powers controlling the natural world who needed to be reckoned with, and that the work of Christ alone was insufficient. Paul had therefore to consider not merely the relation of Christ to the new life but his relation to the universe. Was it possible to secure for Christ a central place in the whole scheme of things so that through him we might feel ourselves independent of every other power? It can easily be understood how in this effort Paul was led to fall back on the Logos conception which he had previously found little occasion to use.

He begins by defining the place of Christ: (1) with refer- 15
ence to God; (2) with reference to creation. Taking up an idea which he had already touched on in 2 Cor. 4:4 he describes Christ as **the likeness** (or image) **of God.** The word implies (as it does in Philo) that he not merely reflects God but in some real sense represents Him; the invisible God becomes manifest in Christ. As thus manifesting God he is **born first before all the creation** (the first-born of all creation), i.e. prior in time to all created things and also prior in dignity. The Arians in a later age argued from this phrase of Paul's that he regarded Christ as part of creation, though prior to all else. But the meaning certainly is that the place of Christ is outside of creation; he was 'born before it,' as the link between the created world and the self-existent God. This idea is enforced in the verse that
follows. Christ is prior to creation because he is the ground 16
of creation; **by or in him all things were created.**

Philo is fond of describing the place of the Logos by the illustration of an architect, who constructs a building first of all in his own mind. The actual building is only the projection in stone and lime of this ideal plan. God, in like manner, created the world in the Logos, and all things visible are modelled on this archetype. Paul's thought is broadly similar to that of Philo. In Christ the creation has its source and inner purpose. He is the principle behind all things, and through him they have unity and meaning. Not only the visible but the heavenly world is thus grounded in Christ (**things both in heaven and on earth**). The heretical teachers insisted on a homage to the angelic powers, but Paul maintains that these, like all other created beings, owe their existence to Christ. This is true even of the highest of the heavenly dignities.

In first-century Judaism the doctrine of angels had been largely developed, with the help of suggestions from Persian mythology. God was conceived as effecting His will by means of a multitude of attendant spirits, who had their functions and ranks assigned to them. At the head of this angelic host were five supreme orders, whose titles are preserved in the well-known line of Milton:

> Thrones, dominations, princedoms, virtues, powers.

Paul makes allusion, in various places, to one or another of these hierarchies (e.g. 1 Cor. 15 : 24, Rom. 8 : 38). Here he mentions four of them, declaring that these highest of angelic rulers were created, like all else, *by Christ and for him.* It is the same thought which the writer of Revelation expresses when he calls Christ the Alpha and Omega—the ultimate cause of the universe and also its final goal. This, then, is the cosmic
17 significance of Christ. **He is prior to** (before) **all** (things)—not merely in point of time but causally—**and all coheres in him** (in him all things hold together). Springing from him they find in him their common bond and centre. He is like the root which makes the innumerable branches and leaves into a living tree.

The passage contains the first attempt (apart from a passing reference like that in 1 Cor. 8 : 6) to attribute a cosmical value to Christ. This line of reflection is foreign to the main tenor of New Testament thought, which concerns itself almost wholly with the moral and religious aspects of Christ's work. Even in the Fourth Gospel and the epistle to the Hebrews, where Christ is viewed in the light of the Logos conception, his creative activity is only touched on incidentally in the opening verses. At a later time, when the effort was made to define the precise metaphysical relation of the Son to the Father, a prominent place was given in theological discussion to the work of Christ in creation. It cannot be denied that the religious interest was too often lost sight of in speculations of this kind. Questions which belonged more properly to philosophy or science were confused with the true message of Jesus. Nevertheless, Paul is right in feeling that a religious issue was involved in the problem which had been raised by the semi-Pagan teachers at Colossae. Our Christian beliefs, although they are primarily concerned with the spiritual life, must somehow be co-ordinated with our whole conception of the world. We cannot rest permanently satisfied with a religion which can only maintain itself by ignoring the difficulties which are forced on us from the side of science. Paul therefore finds himself compelled to grapple with the question of the place of Christ in creation. He works with ancient conceptions, and his philosophy is one which we are now unable to accept, but we can still recognize the truth of his main idea. In Christ, he declares, we must seek for the ultimate meaning of the world. All else exists for those spiritual ends which were supremely manifested in his life and teaching. Apart from him and that which he stands for the universe loses its meaning.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST FOR THE NEW LIFE (1 : 18–23)

**Also, he is the head of the Body, that is, of the church, in 18
virtue of his primacy as the first to be born from the
dead—that gives him preeminence over all. For it was 19
in him that the divine Fulness willed to settle without
limit, and by him it willed to reconcile in his own person 20
all on earth and in heaven alike, in a peace made by the
blood of his cross.**

**Once you were estranged yourselves, your hearts hostile to 21
him in evil-doing ; but now he has reconciled you by
dying in his mortal body, so as to set you consecrated and 22
unblemished and irreproachable in his presence—that is, 23
if you adhere to the foundations and stability of the faith,
instead of moving away from the hope you have learned
in the gospel, that gospel which has been preached to every
creature under heaven, and of which I Paul was made a
minister.**

Paul now proceeds to affirm the unique worth of Christ from another point of view. As he is the source of universal life so he is the source of that new life which is operative in the Church. Elsewhere Paul thinks of Christ as the second Adam—the progenitor of a new race of mankind. Here he

ascribes a still wider scope to Christ's work of redemption. Through him not only the race of men but all created beings have entered on a new phase of existence. The Church in which he reigns is the beginning of a world-wide process of reconciliation. This is the thought which is to be worked out fully in the epistle to the Ephesians, but the main conception is here clearly indicated. Christ is the central
18 principle of the universe, and **he is the head of the Body, that is, of the church.** In previous epistles Paul had described the Church as the Body of Christ, and in 1 Cor. 12 had elaborated the comparison. But the idea was there little more than metaphorical. It was shewn that while the Church is made up of a great number of people, with all their diverse interests, it is yet an organism; it resembles a body, in which all the parts are animated by one life-principle and work harmoniously together.

In the later epistles this idea of the Body of Christ ceases to be figurative, and is made to correspond to a mystical reality. The Church is regarded as the larger incarnation of Christ. As once he appeared in a body of flesh so he now dwells in the Church, and uses it for his self-manifestation, continuing through it the work for which he came. He is **the head of the church,** not merely in the sense that the head is the most important member of the body and controls all the others. The thought rather is that all the forces of the body are gathered up in the head. It is the seat of that life and will which are distributed through the different members and unite them into an organic whole. This significance of Christ as the head is more fully defined in the words that follow: **in virtue of his primacy as the first to be born from the dead.**

Two ideas are combined in this description of Christ as the beginning. The Church originated with him, who was 'the first-born among many brethren' (Rom. 8 : 29), and it depends on him continually, as the source of all its life and energy. This is due to the fact of the Resurrection. He was **the first to be born from the dead,** and so possesses in himself that new and higher life which his people now share, in virtue of their mystical union with him. He rose again to have

preeminence over all. Always he had been first, but by his Resurrection he entered on a sovereignty which was still wider in its scope than that which was his already. This is brought out by the addition of words, which may either be translated ' in all things ' or **over all** (beings). Perhaps both ideas are meant to be suggested. Rising from the dead he shewed himself supreme in every way and also over all existence. There is possibly another allusion to the Colossian heresy. Why should worship be rendered to angels along with Christ when it was evident that in him dwelt a divine power which made him different from all created beings?

An allusion of this kind is certainly present in the next 19 words, rendered by the A.V. ' for it pleased the Father (God) that in him should all the fulness dwell.' In the Greek we have simply ' it was the good pleasure ' ; but this is probably to be taken as the Jewish way of saying, ' it was the will of God.' A similar idiom is frequent in the Rabbinical literature. The words may equally well be translated (as in our translation) **the divine Fulness willed to settle in him without limit.** Here we have the first occurrence of one of the pervading words of these epistles, and perhaps the most difficult. What is meant by **fulness?** In Greek (plerôma) it has two meanings: (*a*) ' something filled in,' i.e. a supplement, and is so applied in Mark 2 : 21 to the patch sewed into the old garment ; (*b*) something completed—a fulfilment or sum-total—as when a ship fully manned is described by Greek writers as having its ' fulness.' This latter meaning appears to be the normal one in Colossians and Ephesians. The word denotes totality or fulfilment, although occasionally this meaning seems to merge in the other one of something added in order to make complete. At a later time the word was adopted as one of the characteristic terms of Gnosticism.

In Gnostic philosophy the divine nature was conceived of as made up of a number of aspects or energies—' aeons ' which emanated from each other in descending scale. These powers, taken all together, constituted the ' plerôma '—the plenitude or totality of the Godhead. Very likely some meaning of this kind had begun to attach to the term at

Colossae. Christ, it was admitted, was of heavenly origin and nature; God was in some manner present in him. But he was only one aspect of the divine nature and in himself was not sufficient; the 'fulness' of divine action, all the powers through which God accomplishes His will, must likewise be taken into account before one can be sure that the Christian salvation has an absolute value. In the light of this we may explain Paul's frequent use of the word in the two epistles. He borrows from the heretics their favourite catch-word, and keeps turning it against them. Christ in his own Person represents the 'fulness.'

20 At this point Paul introduces the idea in which the epistle to Ephesians is to have its central motive. Since the 'fulness' of the divine nature dwells in Christ he has power to **reconcile all** (things) to God, and this he does because he has **made peace by the blood of his cross.** For Paul the death of Christ is the divine act by which the whole work of salvation is accomplished. All the powers hostile to man—sin, death, the Law, the demonic agencies—were vanquished on the Cross, so that now there is peace; that relation between man and God which was formerly broken has been restored. By his reference to the **blood of his cross** Paul does not mean to suggest any of the sacrificial ideas which have often been read into his theology. All that the phrase implies is that Christ died a violent death, like a soldier on the field of battle—only in this instance the death was also the stroke of victory. Man's enemies were destroyed in the death of Christ. In the present verse, however, Paul is not thinking merely of the **peace** which was secured for man. He conceives of the strife in which human life has been involved as only a single phase of a wider conflict. The whole universe has been at war with itself, and Christ has brought peace into man's life because he has **reconciled all** (things), destroying those mysterious forces which have everywhere caused disunion.

An emphatic sentence is added to make this wider scope of the reconciliation perfectly clear; **by him all is brought into harmony, all on earth and in heaven alike.** Paul has told (Rom. 8 : 19–22) how the material creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption and will share in the liberty of the children of God. He declares here that the redemption extends beyond man and his earthly surroundings to things **in heaven.** This train of thought is only incidental in the present epistle. It serves to throw light on the larger background against which the work of Christ must be considered, and at the same time to suggest that those angelic mediators in whom the false teachers trusted were themselves in need of Christ's mediation. In Ephesians the thought is taken up again and developed for its own sake in all its bearings.

After dwelling on the universal significance of Christ Paul 21 indicates how all this affects the situation at Colossae. The heretical teachers had held that the work accomplished by Christ must be supplemented by the action of other heavenly powers. Paul assures his readers that Christ, being what he is, has effected a complete salvation. He has just spoken of the conflict, involving all things in heaven and earth, which has now been brought to an end. How this conflict had arisen he does not try to surmise. In the course of the next century the Gnostic thinkers were to wrestle with this problem and to form endless theories to account for the disunion into which the world had fallen. Paul is content to accept the fact that all things were at strife, and that man's evil condition is only one result of the discord which had befallen the universe. Christ, by his death on the Cross, has healed the discord ; **you** that were once **estranged he has now reconciled.** In man, however, the alienation which is everywhere apparent has expressed itself in moral evil—**your hearts hostile to him in evil-doing** (enemies in your mind by wicked works—A.V.). The hostility was rooted in the disposition of the will, and had its outcome in evil deeds. When men were thus 22 estranged from God they were reconciled by Christ who died **in his mortal body** (literally, the body of his flesh).

It is one of the central ideas of Paul's theology that the sinful principle has its seat in the 'flesh,' by which he means not only the material of which man's body is composed but the lower nature as a whole. All motives and thoughts and desires which belong to the mere earthly existence are included in the flesh. In order to do battle with sin on its own ground Christ assumed a body of flesh; as Paul boldly expresses it in 2 Cor. 5 : 21, 'He who knew no sin was made sin for us.' Thus his physical death on the Cross had a moral value, and was universal in its effect. By the destruction of his own flesh he destroyed the principle of flesh which involves the whole race in sin. On its positive side the object of his death was **to set** (present) **you** (at the final judgment) **consecrated** (holy) **and unblemished and irreproachable.** One is here reminded of the splendid close of the eighth chapter of Romans: 'Who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect?' In both passages Paul imagines Christ's people as appearing, along with the rest of mankind, before God's judgment-seat. No accusing angel will dare to bring anything against them, since Christ has won for them a complete deliverance.

23 This issue, however, is subject to the condition, **that is if you adhere to the foundations and stability of the faith.** With these words Paul approaches the definite aim of his letter. The salvation he has spoken of depends on a right faith in Christ, and under the influence of the false teachers the Colossian Christians have been tempted to waver. Paul does not believe that they have actually fallen, but he thinks it well to warn them. They need to have **the foundations of** their faith so firmly laid that they cannot possibly be moved **away from the hope in the gospel.** It is implied that disloyalty to the true Christian message will entail the loss of that glorious inheritance which it promises. And as he speaks of the gospel Paul again reminds his readers that their faith in it is shared by a great fellowship of believers. It is a message which **you have learned** (heard) **and which has been preached to every creature under heaven.** Paul's mind is still full of the thought that the whole creation has part in the work of Christ. The gospel has brought joy not to men only but to all the distracted world.

PAUL'S ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF AND HIS LABOURS (1 : 24–2 : 3)

24 **I am suffering now on your behalf, but I rejoice in that; I would make up the full sum of all that Christ has to suffer**

in my person on behalf of the church, his Body ; for 25
I am a minister of the church by the divine commission
which has been granted me in your interests, to make a
full presentation of God's message—of that open secret 26
which, though concealed from ages and generations of
old, has now been disclosed to the saints of God. It is 27
His will that they should understand the glorious wealth
which this secret holds for the Gentiles, in the fact of
Christ's presence among you as your hope of glory.
This is the Christ we proclaim ; we train everyone and 28
teach everyone the full scope of this knowledge, in order
to set everyone before God mature in Christ ; I labour 29
for that end, striving for it with the divine energy which
is a power within me. Striving ? Yes, I want you ii.
to understand my deep concern for you and for those 1
at Laodicea, for all who have never seen my face.
May their hearts be encouraged ! May they learn 2
the meaning of love ! May they have all the wealth of
conviction that comes from insight ! May they learn to
know that open secret of God, the Father of Christ, in 3
whom all *the treasures of wisdom* and knowledge lie *hidden* !

The reference to the gospel and its world-wide extension leads Paul to dwell for a little on his own work as a missionary. Why does he introduce this digression about himself ? His motive may partly be to justify his seeming presumption in writing. In times past he had bitterly resented the interference of strangers in Galatia, Corinth, and other churches, and had made it his own rule 'not to build upon another man's foundation' (Rom. 15 : 20). Now, however, he is about to speak in terms of remonstrance to this church which he had never seen, and feels it necessary to explain that he is within his rights. As an apostle of that gospel which is offered to the whole world, his commission is world-wide, and includes even churches like Colossae, which he has never personally visited. Besides this motive, there is another which may be gathered from the verses which follow. He is aware that he has a peculiar right to speak of the true meaning of the gospel. He has undergone great sufferings on its behalf, and his sufferings have revealed to him things which are hidden from others. He has been gifted, too, with a special insight which enables him to penetrate into the deeper counsels of God. Before he discloses them he wishes to impress on his readers that he can speak with due authority.

24 He begins by telling of his sufferings, and lays emphasis on the fact that they have been incurred on behalf of others, **on your behalf . . . on behalf of the church** which is Christ's **Body**. It is for this reason that he can **rejoice** in his sufferings. Their effect will be to secure some great good for the Church as a whole and for the Colossian Christians who form a part of the Church. The meaning of the words **I would make** (or fill) **up the full sum of all that Christ has to suffer in my person** has been much disputed. The choice appears to lie between two interpretations:

(1) All that Christ suffered in his actual life on earth was only part of what he required to suffer for man's salvation; so through his followers he still continues to suffer until the whole sum will finally be complete. Paul therefore regards his own hardships as his contribution towards making up what is still wanting in the suffering of Christ (' that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ '—A.V.). In this idea there is certainly a profound suggestion, and it falls in with much of our modern thinking as to the meaning of Christianity. The Cross did not stand by itself as the symbol of what had been achieved once for all, but was the example of how all true work for humanity must be accomplished. Men must be inspired to live in the spirit of the Cross; they must help their fellow-men, as Christ himself did, by sacrifice, and all that they thus suffer is like a part of Christ's great sacrifice. The world is to be saved by an unending Atonement, which derives its impulse from the Atonement made by Christ. It is very doubtful, however, whether Paul would have thought in this manner. For him the Cross emphatically stood for something which had been done once for all. In this epistle, more especially, his whole argument rests on

the belief that the work of Christ is all-sufficient and does not need to be supplemented by any other agencies. If he had declared that there was something lacking in what Christ had done he would have endorsed just the ideas which he has set himself to oppose.

(2) According to the other interpretation Paul is thinking of his own fellowship with Christ (**in my person**). It is one of his fundamental thoughts that the Christian is mystically united with Christ, suffers with him, dies with him, rises with him into new life. So here he declares that he has not yet fully perfected his fellowship with Christ's sufferings. He rejoices in all new hardships because they bring him nearer to his ideal of a life completely conformed to Christ. This, it can hardly be doubted, is the true meaning of the verse. It is to be noted that Paul guards himself against a morbid satisfaction in suffering for its own sake. His attitude has nothing in common with that of the later monks and ascetics who inflicted torture on themselves in the belief that this would procure them favour with God. Paul endures his hardships **on behalf of the church**. It is part of his sharing in the experience of Christ that all his suffering has come to him in the way of duty.

Besides the difficulty as to the main thought there is some doubt as to how two expressions in the sentence should be understood : (1) Paul describes his action by a word which means literally 'fill up instead.' The prefix has been supposed to favour the sense 'I supplement,' 'I do my part in completing.' But it seems rather to enforce the idea of a gradual process—'I keep filling up one after another.' (2) What is implied in 'the sufferings or afflictions of Christ'? This phrase may mean (*a*) the things which Christ suffered ; (*b*) the sufferings required by Christ ; (*c*) sufferings in Christ's cause. In view of Paul's mystical doctrine none of these meanings seems entirely adequate. He wishes to suggest that his own sufferings are at the same time those of Christ. He can say, as he does in Gal. 2 : 20 : 'It is no longer I that live but Christ liveth in me.'

He now proceeds to emphasize **the divine commission** by 25

which he labours for the Church ; **for I am a minister of the church by the divine commission which has been granted me in your interests.** Here again we meet for the first time with a word (*oikonomia*, commission) which plays a great part in these epistles. Elsewhere, as we shall see, it refers to God's own action—the plan by which He has ordered the course of history that He may carry out His purpose. In the present verse Paul thinks rather of a commission or stewardship entrusted to himself by God. Its object is that he should **make a full presentation of God's message** (' fulfil the word of God '—A.V.)—i.e. proclaim the gospel message in all its fulness. He does not mean, however, that in his teaching he aimed at rendering a full account of everything included in the gospel ; as the next words shew, he identifies the message with one great truth which lay at the heart of it and which he sought to make clear in all its import. This truth
26 he describes as **the open secret** (literally, ' mystery ') **concealed from ages and generations of old.**

We have here yet another of the characteristic words of the two epistles, and it calls at this point for some investigation. The word ' mystery ' originated in the Pagan religions, where it played such a great part that the cults of the Hellenistic age are usually known as the ' mystery religions.' It was assumed that every form of worship consisted of two parts. On the one hand there were the public ceremonies and accepted beliefs which were open to all. On the other hand there were certain esoteric rites and doctrines which were divulged only to chosen initiates under a seal of secrecy—a seal so faithfully kept that to this day we cannot do more than guess at the inner nature of those religions. It has been assumed by many recent scholars that Paul uses the word in the sense which it bore in contemporary religion, and that he thinks of the gospel as involving an occult doctrine, reserved for the few. This, however, would be directly contrary to his statement here that his aim was to proclaim the ' mystery ' fully to all the world. We need to remember that in Paul's time the word had passed into general language and had come to signify a secret of any kind. In this sense it is employed in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament to express the hidden counsel of God. Paul also uses it with this wider meaning. He believes that in all His dealings with men God had been working on a deep plan, a secret purpose which can only be discovered by the illumination of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2 : 7 f.).

Emphasis is constantly laid in the epistles on this deeper element in the gospel, and to this extent we may trace the influence of the current ' mystery ' ideas. It is impressed on us ever and again that in the ordinances and teachings of Christianity there is something which is not apparent on the surface—a profound wisdom which needs to be explored, under the guidance of the Spirit. This ' mystery ' or **secret** has been **concealed from ages and generations.** The thought may be simply that which is expressed in the words of Jesus : ' Many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which ye see and saw them not ' (Matt. 13 : 17). But we know that in the Gnostic systems the terms ' ages ' and ' generations ' were applied in a technical sense to the heavenly hierarchies, and a meaning of this kind may have been attached to them in the mythologies of Paul's day. In 1 Cor. 2 : 7, 8, he speaks of the divine plan as hidden from the angelic powers, and in view of the cosmical sweep of his thought in the epistle we may assume that a similar idea is here in his mind. The mysterious secret which has been hidden from angels is **now disclosed to the saints of God,** i.e. to Christian men. To them God willed to make known 27
the glorious wealth (literally, the riches of the glory) **which this secret** (mystery) **holds.**

Here (as in ver. 11) we must remember that ' glory ' in the language of Paul carries with it the idea of something divine, and the whole phrase might almost be rendered ' the richness in divine significance.' The wonder of the mystery is all the greater as it is now revealed **for** (or among) **the Gentiles,** who had hitherto lain in darkness, and who yet had received this gospel, which carried with it the ultimate secret of God's plan for the world. What the secret consists in is now explicitly stated : ' Christ in you, the hope of glory.' These words might be translated 'Christ among you,' i.e. among you Gentiles, and this rendering is preferred by many expositors (e.g. Lightfoot). If they are thus taken, the mystery would consist in the offer of salvation to the Gentile world. This great section of mankind had seemed to be for ever excluded from God's favour, and yet it had been His secret plan from the beginning that Christ should exercise his power among them and bring them his salvation.

One cannot but feel, however, that after the solemn manner in which Paul has led up to the disclosure of the secret 'mystery' there would be something of an anti-climax if it consisted in nothing more than the inauguration of a Gentile mission. Moreover, he has already said (ver. 25) that the 'word of God,' i.e. the gospel itself, is the 'mystery.' He must therefore be speaking here not merely of the diffusion of the gospel but of its inner content. For every reason the phrase 'Christ in you' needs to be taken in its mystical sense. The mystery of God, hidden from all eternity and now revealed, is the indwelling of Christ in his people, whether Jews or Gentiles: **the fact of Christ's presence among you.** God had planned that this fellowship with Christ should be the **hope of glory,** i.e. should bring the certainty of salvation. Christ is 'the likeness of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.' United with him men share in the very nature of God.

28 Paul now proceeds to shew that as an apostle, endowed with a special insight into the meaning of the gospel, he has a full right to advise the Colossians on matters of faith. He lays a strong emphasis on the universality of his mission: **we train** (admonish) **everyone and teach everyone . . . in order to set** (present) **everyone mature** (perfect). Not only does he have the right to instruct all men, but he does this with **the full scope of this knowledge** (' in all wisdom '—A.V.). On all that concerns Christian doctrine he is able to speak with the fullest **knowledge** through the illumination of the Spirit. Perhaps, too, he wishes to suggest that in his teaching he withholds nothing. The heretics laid claim to a secret knowledge which could only be communicated to a gifted

few ; the duty of a Christian teacher, as Paul conceives it, is to make all men acquainted with the whole truth. A similar reference has been discovered by some scholars in the words, to make **everyone mature** or perfect. A distinction was made in the Pagan religions between the ordinary worshipper and the initiate or ‘ perfect ’ man. It has been suggested that Paul here uses the technical term, and declares that he aims at making every man an initiate. But there is no ground for supposing that here or anywhere else in the epistles the word has any but its general meaning of **mature** or ‘ full-grown.’ As in Eph. 4 : 13, Paul expresses his desire that every Christian should grow up ‘ to the measure of the full stature of Christ,’ and should so appear at the final Judgment.

In the closing verse of the chapter he takes an illustration, 29 as he does so often, from the athletic games. He thinks of himself as taking part in a great contest. For this **end I labour,** and the strength he puts forth is not his own ; it is **with the divine energy which is a power within me.** A divine power has taken possession of him and raises him above himself. The word for **energy** is one of the characteristic words of Paul, and reflects his idea that through faith in Christ a man connects his life with higher forces which support and increase his own endeavour.

ii.

In the opening verses of the next chapter Paul continues 1 the account of his ministry with special reference to his interest in the Colossians. He has a right to address them not merely as an apostle, who has the whole Church as his province, but as a personal friend, deeply concerned in their welfare, although he has never seen them face to face. Taking up the imagery of the preceding verse he describes his anxiety for them as a **striving** or conflict (literally, wrestling), on behalf not only of Colossae but of the neighbouring churches. He particularly mentions **those** in the church **at Laodicea,** no doubt because he intends the letter to be read in that church also (cf. 4 : 16). The words that follow, **all who have never seen my face,** are probably meant to include the other church in the Lycus valley, Hierapolis, which would also be eager

2 to read the letter. His anxiety is that **their hearts may be encouraged.** Although his real purpose is to warn them against dangerous errors he speaks of it as one of exhortation, tactfully avoiding any word that may seem offensive or dictatorial. In like manner he describes his aim as to 'unite' or 'instruct' them in **love.** The word he uses may be translated in either way, and since it is employed several times in these epistles in the former sense, this meaning has usually been given to it here. But in Colossians Paul has little to say on the subject of unity. His aim is to expound the true gospel in opposition to the new type of teaching which threatened to subvert it. The present context suits better with the other meaning of the Greek word, and the whole phrase may be rendered 'taught **the meaning of love**' or 'being lovingly instructed.' He has things to say which may not be altogether pleasant but he wishes them to be taken in a kindly spirit as they are meant. This idea is brought out more clearly in the next words; the whole purpose of his admonitions is not a harsh or negative one but to lead them into **all the wealth of conviction** (i.e. full assurance) **that comes from insight** (i.e. complete and assured understanding). He knows that by his apostolic authority he may be able to force his readers into the acceptance of a given belief. He knows, too, that his arguments ought to have weight enough to overcome the childish ideas which have gained currency at Colossae. But a mere intellectual assent is worth little. He wishes to produce a free and entire **conviction** which will change the whole life into something richer.

The next words are a desire that they may **learn to know that open secret** or mystery **of God,** even **Christ.** There are few places in the New Testament where the manuscripts differ so widely as in these few words. Only a few of the variants need be mentioned: 'the mystery of the God Christ'; 'the mystery of God and Christ'; 'the mystery of God in Christ'; 'the mystery of God the Father and of Christ'; or, as in our translation, the mystery **of God, the Father of Christ.** It is plain that the ancient authorities were in doubt as to the content of the secret or 'mystery'

which Paul had set himself to proclaim, and read the present verse in various ways according to their different views. The text here adopted is that which has the best evidence on its side and has found a place in most modern editions of the Greek New Testament. It is also most consistent with the account which has already been given of the 'mystery' in 1 : 27 : 'Christ in you the hope of glory.' Paul there lays stress on the indwelling of Christ, but while this is not expressly mentioned in the verse before us, it is not excluded, and seems, indeed, to be implied. All that is deepest in the counsel of God is summed up in Christ, and we can know Christ as an inward presence, making our lives one with his life. Christ is the 'mystery' because in him lie hidden 3
all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Paul is now about to deal directly with the heresy at Colossae, and these words are meant to introduce his discussion of it. The false teachers professed to impart a secret wisdom not included in the gospel, but Paul contends that in Christ and in him alone can we discover all the profoundest truth. It is not necessary to distinguish (as some scholars have tried to do) between 'wisdom' and 'knowledge.' The two words were both employed in the philosophical language of the time for that power of the mind which can lay hold of the deeper reality underlying the transient and visible. Paul thinks of an infinite treasure of divine truth which is waiting to be explored. He reserves to the end of the Greek sentence the word 'hidden' on which he wishes to throw the main emphasis. Christ is the great 'mystery,' because he represents far more than has yet been disclosed. The more we search into his significance the more it appears inexhaustible. According to an ancient Jewish belief the Messiah was hidden in heaven from the beginning of the creation until the hour should come when God would reveal him. Paul has this belief in his mind when he speaks, as in 1 Cor. 1 : 7, of 'waiting for the revelation of Jesus Christ.' Here he seems to transfer the idea from Christ himself to the truth contained in Christ. His attitude to the gospel is like that of Newton in presence of the mystery of nature : 'I feel like a child who has picked up a few pebbles on the shore of a boundless ocean.'

INTRODUCTION TO THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE
(2 : 4-7)

4 **I say this to prevent you from being deluded by plausible**
5 **arguments from anybody; for although I am absent**
in body I am with you in spirit, and it is a joy to note your
steadiness and the solid front of your faith in Christ.
6 **Since you have had the messiah, even Jesus the Lord, brought**
7 **to you, lead your life in him, fixed and founded in him,**
confirmed in the faith as you have been taught it, and
overflowing with thankfulness to God.

4 In ver. 4 Paul makes his first direct allusion to the false teachers. His words about **arguments from anybody** may point to some particular man who was misleading the Colossian church, and it is more than probable that there was some one teacher who was mainly responsible for the heresy. But Paul is intentionally vague. His warnings are not against personalities but against the type of thought they stand for. The word translated **deluded** carries with it the idea of being led astray by false reasoning—an idea which is made explicit in the added words **by plausible arguments.** It was the danger of this new teaching that it could support itself by reasons which appeared on the surface to be highly philosophical. Thus it made a strong appeal to those who fancied themselves as intellectual, and who were not satisfied with the apparent simplicity of the gospel.

5 Now that he has entered on his remonstrance Paul again interrupts himself to assure his readers that his one motive is his solicitude for them, and that he has no doubt of their zeal and fidelity. Though he is personally a stranger he is with them **in spirit,** and rejoices **to note** (or behold) their **steadiness** or order, **and the solid front of** their **faith in Christ.** The terms he uses are of military origin, and convey the idea of a well-ordered line of battle with a solid depth behind it—an unbroken front with strong supports. It is hard to say

whether he has the military metaphor consciously in his mind. Our own language is full of military terms (rank and file, word of command, entrenchments, reserves, etc.) which we use constantly without any thought of their origin. In Paul's time, likewise, the technical terms of warfare had passed into the current language. The main idea of the verse is that the faith of the Colossians has thus far stood every test, and for this very reason he is anxious to warn them.

6 **Since you have had the messiah, even Jesus the Lord, brought to you, lead your life in him.** From Epaphras they had learned the true Christian teaching, which is summed up in the titles which are here solemnly ascribed to Christ—each one of them conveying a peculiar weight of meaning. **Jesus,** whose life and death they knew, was the promised **messiah,** and had now taken his place as the glorified **Lord.** A special meaning attaches too to the phrase **in him.** Paul thinks of the Christian life as springing from the mystical union with Christ. Obedience to his precepts, following his example, is not enough. They must live as men united with him and deriving their own life from his.

7 This thought is expanded in the verse that follows: **fixed and founded in him,** is, literally, 'rooted and built up in him.' The metaphor is purposely mixed in order to bring out two separate ideas: the sustaining faith of the Christian is to be something *fixed* once for all—the conduct which rests upon it is to be always growing towards perfection, like a house in process of building. In 1 : 23 the natural metaphor of a foundation was used, but here it gives place to that of a root, in order to suggest that faith must be a living thing, energizing the conduct that springs from it. This is stated more explicitly in the next words: made firm by faith, **as you have been taught it.** (' By faith ' is preferable to **in (the) faith,** since Paul is thinking of faith as an active principle.) The exhortation closes with that call to **thankfulness** which has already been noted as characteristic of the epistle. There has been nothing in the passage to suggest the idea of thanks, but for Paul it is the necessary accompaniment of all Christian virtues If his readers overflow **with thankfulness,** abounding

in thanksgiving, he can be sure of the genuineness of their faith.

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN TEACHING CONTRASTED WITH THE HERESY (2 : 8–15)

8 Beware of anyone getting hold of you by means of a theosophy
which is specious make-believe, on the lines of human
tradition, corresponding to the Elemental spirits of the
9 world and not to Christ. It is in Christ that the entire
Fulness of deity has settled bodily, it is in him that you
10 reach your full life, and he is the Head of every angelic
11 Ruler and Power ; in him you have been circumcised
with no material circumcision that cuts flesh from the
12 body, but with Christ's own circumcision, when you were
buried with him in your baptism and thereby raised with
him as you believed in the power of the God who raised
13 him from the dead. For though you were dead in your
trespasses, your flesh uncircumcised, he made you live
14 with Christ, he forgave us all our trespasses, he cancelled
the regulations that stood against us—all these obligations
15 he set aside, when he nailed them to the cross, when he
cut away the angelic Rulers and Powers from us, exposing
them to all the world and triumphing over them in the
cross.

This passage consists of a single long sentence in which Paul crowds together the beliefs which he considers most vital to Christianity, and which had all been imperilled by the new doctrines which had found favour at Colossae. Owing to the great condensation of the thought the passage is one of peculiar difficulty. Paul is trying to gather up into the briefest compass all the things that are essential to faith and at the same time to expose the errors of the false teachers. The difficulty is all the greater, as he assumes on the part of his readers a knowledge which we do not now possess. They were conversant with the strange doctrines, and were able to fill in the hints and allusions which for us have grown doubtful or unintelligible. It would have made the meaning of the whole epistle much clearer if Paul had indicated the nature of the new doctrines in plain terms ; but we have to remember that he was not writing for the world at large but for the Colossians. They knew what the heretics had to say, while they had never had an opportunity of hearing Paul. So he dwells on what he himself taught, leaving them to supply the contrary opinions from their own knowledge.

In ver. 8 he takes up again the warning which had been 8
broken off at ver. 4 : **Beware of anyone getting hold of you :** the Greek verb is a rare and graphic one which pictures the false teachers as man-stealers, whose one purpose was to entrap innocent souls and drag them off into slavery. This capture they effect **by means of a theosophy which is specious make-believe,** literally, ' philosophy and vain deceit.' Philosophy is mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament, and in this one reference it is coupled with **specious make-believe** or ' vain deceit.' But it would be wrong to take this slighting notice as implying a contempt, on the part of early Christianity, of one of the noblest occupations of the human mind. Philosophy in Paul's day had run to strange extravagances, as it has occasionally done since. The men who made the loudest claims to be ' philosophers ' were often charlatans (like the notorious Apollonius of Tyana) or visionaries who mistook their wild fancies and obscure jargon for profound thought. By his addition of ' vain deceit ' Paul seeks to make clear that he has this kind of empty speculation in his mind. Very likely, too, he is repeating, with an ironical emphasis, a favourite word of the heretical teachers. Their success was chiefly due to their claim to make the gospel more philosophical, acceptable to men of culture and intelligence, and not merely to the ignorant masses. The real force of the expression might be best brought out by adopting **theosophy** or by the simple device of printing ' philosophy ' with inverted commas.

Paul further describes the false teaching as being **on the lines of** (according to) **human tradition.** The word ' tradition ' is often used in a technical sense (especially in the Gospels) for the accumulation of scribal commentary which had grown up around the Law, and had, in great measure, perverted it (cf. Mark 7 : 13). This can hardly be the meaning here, since Paul is speaking of a type of thought which based itself on ‘ philosophy ’ and not on the Jewish Law. So we must understand him to refer in a general way to the current Pagan theories. They are not founded, he says, on any reality, but are mere guess-work, and are taken over on hearsay by one man from another. Not only so, but they correspond to the elements of the world **and not to Christ.** The interpretation here depends on the very puzzling word ‘ elements,’ which is also found in Gal. 4 : 3, 9. It means literally ‘ things set in a row,’ and thus came to be applied to the letters of the alphabet—the A B C in a children's primer. (The Latin equivalent *elementa* is derived by some scholars from L M N, which may at one time have stood first in the alphabetical order.) Starting from this simple origin the word passed through a remarkable history. It came to signify : (1) the rudiments of any subject ; (2) the ‘ elements ’ to which any composite subject can be reduced, and more particularly, air, fire, earth, water—the elements of the material world ; (3) the stars were regarded as in a peculiar sense the primordial substances, and were hence known as the ‘ elements ’ ; (4) from the stars and the elements of nature the name was transferred to the spiritual beings who were believed to preside over them and direct them. Thus it finally came to be accepted as a general name for supernatural agencies, angels or demons.

In which of these various meanings does Paul employ the word ? It was formerly assumed that he referred to rudimentary knowledge (‘ the rudiments of the world ’—A.V.), and this view is still held by many. The epithets ‘ weak and beggarly ’ which are applied to the ‘ elements ’ in Galatians might well seem to indicate a childish A B C, beyond which the idle seeker in religion never tries to pass. So in the present verse Paul may be glancing at the puerility of those teachers at Colossae, in spite of their pretensions to a deep philosophy. According to another view, the reference is to the physical elements. The higher wisdom on which the heretics pride themselves is nothing, in the last resort, but a crude materialism. They have no glimpse of spiritual reality, and move wholly within the sphere of the visible world. But most probably Paul has in mind the Colossian angel-worship, and uses the word 'elements' in its sense of supernatural beings: **the Elemental spirits of the world.** This explanation is borne out by the contrast he draws between the 'elements' and Christ; in both cases the question is of personal agencies, and the false teachers have chosen the lower instead of the higher. The qualifying phrase **of the world** also fits in with this interpretation. Those angelic beings to whom the false worship is directed are concerned with the visible and perishing things, not with those abiding realities which we know through Christ.

This supreme significance of Christ is set forth in the next 9 verse, which takes up again the idea of 1 : 19. **The entire Fulness of deity,** or the plenitude of Godhead, dwells **in Christ.** It is not Paul's custom to speak of God in abstract philosophical terms like **deity,** and perhaps here again he falls back on one of the phrases affected by the heretics. Or it may be that he uses the phrase deliberately by way of contrast to **the world** in the previous verse. As the angelic beings have to do with the material creation and partake of its nature, so Christ stands for the divine order. All the fulness of God's essence dwells in him **bodily.** There is no reference here to the Incarnation, for Paul's mind is fixed on Christ as he is now, in his heavenly glory. The idea is rather that of full reality. The heretics believed that Christ represented God, but that he did so in some imperfect manner, so that his action needed to be supplemented. Paul declares with a strong emphasis that there is nothing in God's nature which is not fully present in Christ.

The thought of this fulness in Christ leads him now to 10 dwell on the full salvation which Christ has brought to his people. **It is in him that you reach your full life,** so that possessing him you require no further aid. Attempts have been made to discover some recondite meaning in 'you have been fulfilled' (you are complete), but this is unnecessary. Paul is merely expressing a simple idea by a sort of play on words. ‘ He is the fulness of God and in him you have all fulness.’ There is this all-sufficiency in Christ because **he is the Head** of all the angelic powers. As before (1 : 18) Christ is called **the Head** with reference not only to his sovereign place but to the life which proceeds from him. He originates and sums up in himself all other power. The governing angels, ‘ dominions and principalities,’ depend on him for their very being.

In vers. 11–15 the **fulness** which we have in Christ is described in detail. At a later time the things that were deemed essential to Christian faith were gathered up into a formal creed. Paul here makes his own creed, briefly stating the great verities which he has elsewhere expounded at length ; he defines his own beliefs in their antithesis to the false doctrines which he is combating. In the heresy everything had been made to centre on certain outward rites which were supposed to carry a magical efficacy, and with these practices in his mind Paul indicates the true conditions of salvation. He lays stress on three things—the real circumcision which is given in baptism, the new life that comes through faith in the Resurrection, the cancelling of the demands of the Law.

11 He points out first, then, that the literal circumcision of which the heretics made so much has now given place to a **circumcision** that is no material rite, i.e. a circumcision of a purely spiritual nature (the same word is used with the same meaning in Mark 14 : 58). Our translation defines this material circumcision as one that **cuts flesh from the body,** but these words may be rather taken to imply that the material rite was only the symbol of a condition that must be effected in man's inward being ; this higher circumcision consists in ‘ the putting off of the body of the flesh,’ i.e. of the whole carnal nature. The flesh for Paul includes all that part of man's being—thoughts, impulses, desires—which he inherits as a creature of earth. This principle of the flesh which resides in him is the stronghold of sin, and Christ brought deliverance from sin by destroying the flesh. The literal rite of circumcision therefore must be replaced by

Christ's own circumcision, namely, that putting off of the fleshly nature which is effected for us by Christ.

In the next verse this Christian circumcision is associated 12 with baptism, which signifies for Paul that we are **buried with** Christ **and raised with him.** These words find their explanation in Rom. 6 : 4 f., where baptism is regarded as the repetition, in a dramatic act, of the experience of Christ. The sinking into the water corresponds to his death, the immersion to his burial, the rising from the water to his resurrection. Paul evidently attaches a real value to the act of baptism ; though in itself a symbolic ordinance, it serves in some way to complete the thing it signifies. At the same time he insists, in a number of passages (cf. especially 1 Cor. 1 : 14 f.), that baptism is not to be considered a magical act, valid in itself, but owes all its value to the faith of which it is the manifestation. So here he declares that we rise with Christ in baptism through faith **in the power of the God who raised him from the dead.** By submitting to baptism we confess our faith in Christ, who died and rose again, and by so doing throw ourselves on God, whose love and power were revealed in Christ. It is this trust in God which gives meaning and efficacy to the baptismal rite.

Paul now declares that Gentiles as well as Jews have 13 part in the Redemption. It would seem that the Colossian teachers had regarded the Jews as peculiarly privileged, and had required the Gentiles to place themselves on the same footing by adoption of the Jewish practices. Hence the emphasis which is here placed on 'you,' i.e. you Gentiles. **You were dead in** (i.e. through) **your trespasses, your flesh uncircumcised** (the sins of which you were actually guilty and the evil nature out of which they arose). There is no trace of any Jewish doctrine that uncircumcision was the sign of a natural wickedness or original sin which was removed by the sacred ordinance. Circumcision, however, meant admission into the body of the favoured people, and was thus supposed to bring a man into a different relation to God. From this point of view uncircumcision was a fatal barrier. Without the racial token men could have no claim on God's mercy and forgiveness. Paul assures his readers that under the gospel uncircumcision no longer means spiritual death. God made **you live with Christ**; in the Resurrection of Christ you also arose to a new life. Then he turns from the second person to the first; Jews and Gentiles alike had stood in need of God's forgiveness, and through Christ we have all been forgiven **all our trespasses**, on the same footing and by the same means.

14 The next two verses are very difficult, and at the same time of primary importance for Paul's doctrine of the Atonement. There can be no doubt as to the general meaning. By his death Christ has destroyed the Law, under which man stood condemned, and has also set us free from the tyranny of all evil powers. These ideas, however, are expressed in terms of a vivid imagery to which the precise key is uncertain. In point of language also, and even of grammar, the meaning of the verses is obscure. Paul begins by declaring that on the Cross Christ **cancelled** or blotted out **the regulations that stood against us**. The words translated **regulations** mean literally bond, or handwriting, consisting in decrees. In the language of Paul's time, the word for 'bond' was often used in the sense of a note of hand, an IOU, and this may be its meaning here. If we so take it, the Law is regarded as a statement of debts, admitted by men themselves under their own signature. The word, however, was also applied to a statement of any kind, e.g. the indictment drawn up against a prisoner. This meaning appears to suit the present context best, and goes naturally with the added words **against us**, which would hardly be in place if a mere statement of obligations was in question.

The clause that follows may be translated 'consisting in decrees,' or, **all these obligations**, i.e. the Law was made up of certain imperative demands which man found himself unable to fulfil. But it may equally well be rendered 'which by reason of its decrees was against us,' and this translation seems preferable. Paul has just spoken of the indictment against us, and feels it necessary to explain why the Law must be so regarded. It was meant to secure our condemnation because the requirements laid down in it were utterly beyond our power and yet had penalties attached to them if we disobeyed. This view of the Law is frequent in Paul. With all his reverence for the Law he thinks of it as one of our chief enemies, since it holds up an ideal which it gives us no power to realize. It must be considered not as the means of life but as a sentence of death. Thus the image in the verse is that of a champion who comes to our aid when we are to undergo trial on a capital charge. He takes the document which would have secured our condemnation and blots out the fatal writing. It is to be noted that Paul thinks of Gentiles and Jews alike as amenable to the Law. As he explains in the first and second chapters of Romans, the Law is to be understood as the explicit statement of what all men owe to God. The Jews have the divine will before them in a definite written form, while the Gentiles have 'a law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness' (Rom. 2 : 15). But this inward law, though more obscure, corresponds to that which came through Moses to the Jews.

The imagery now changes, though the idea is the same as that already emphasized. Paul ceases to regard the indictment as merely sponged out, and describes it as posted up in some public place to shew that it has been fully satisfied. **He set it aside,** nailing it **to the cross.** It may be that there is a reference here to some ancient custom of declaring that a charge or contract had been quashed by driving a nail through the document and so placing it where it could be seen by all. No trace, however, can be discovered of any such custom. Most likely Paul has in mind the Roman practice of suspending over the head of a victim the charge on which he had been condemned. This practice, as we know from the gospels, was followed at the Crucifixion ; the Cross bore the superscription 'The King of the Jews.' The circumstance must have been well known to Paul, but he boldly ignores the real superscription, and imagines the Law as nailed above the Cross. This, on the deeper view, was the charge on which Christ was put to death. He suffered in order to satisfy in our stead 'the indictment which was against us' and has thus **set it aside.**

15 The next verse is extremely difficult, though the idea is again sufficiently clear. It was believed in the early church that behind the death of Christ there was a conspiracy on the part of the powers of evil; the chief priests and Romans were only the unconscious instruments of those supernatural powers. Paul dwells on this conception in 1 Cor. 2:6 f., where he says that in compassing the death of Christ the 'princes of this world' had unwittingly brought about their own destruction. They had thought to defeat God's plan by slaying His incarnate Son, and all the time the very purpose of God had been that Christ should conquer man's enemies by his death. In like manner the death of Christ is here pictured as the triumph of God (or of Christ himself) over the opposing powers. But while the general meaning is clear the verse presents some almost insoluble problems. **When he cut away the angelic Rulers and Powers from us,** may also be translated, 'having stripped off from himself.' This rendering is accepted by the R.V., and a strong case for it is presented in Lightfoot's commentary. If the words are so taken the meaning must be that the powers of evil had entrenched themselves in Christ's fleshly nature. 'He that knew no sin was made sin for us,' and in his death he threw off this contaminated nature which he had assumed for our sakes, thus breaking free from his enemies.

Grammatically, however, the subject of the whole sentence appears to be not Christ but God. Even if this objection is not pressed, the imagery suggested would be forced and artificial, and there would be a strange mixture of metaphor in the description of the angelic powers as at once a discarded robe and a train of captive enemies. It seems better to translate (as in the A.V.) 'having spoiled the principalities and powers,' which gives a clear and consistent image. Christ is conceived as doing battle with the great captains of that supernatural host which had enslaved the human race. He has beaten them down and stripped them of their armour, and then **exposed them,** by making them a public spectacle—exhibiting them to men and angels as his captives. In the added words, **triumphing over them,** there is possibly a definite reference to a Roman triumph, but this is not certain. The word 'triumph' was frequently used then as now to express the idea of exultation after victory, and Paul himself appears to give it this more general sense in 2 Cor. 2 : 14.

A special difficulty attaches to the closing words, which may either be translated 'in it' or 'in him.' If they are taken in the former sense the reference is to the Cross, and we have a graphic image which cannot be given up without reluctance. The cross on which Christ died is compared to the chariot in which the victor rode in triumph. But again and again in this passage the phrase has occurred in the sense 'in him,' i.e. in Christ, and we seem compelled to give it the same meaning here. God triumphed in Christ over all hostile powers. They imagined that they had won a victory over God, but in the death of Christ he had vanquished them.

In this passage, then, Paul has summed up the essential truths of Christianity over against the false teaching, but at the close he comes back to the question of the angelic powers, on which the main argument of the epistle is made to centre. Elsewhere he describes the heretics as requiring a service of angels, who are supposed to co-operate with Christ in the work of salvation. Here he assumes that the angels were tyrannical enemies who had to be overthrown. This seeming contradiction as to the function of the angels has cast an obscurity over the whole nature of the Colossian heresy. Did it regard the angels as beneficent or malignant? Did it insist on 'worship' in the proper sense, or merely on conciliation of powerful enemies? Probably both views are to be accepted. The heretics may have divided the angelic powers into two classes—those which were favourable to man and those which were hostile. These different kinds of angels had to be played off against each other. The malice of the hostile angels was to be counteracted by enlisting the aid of the beneficent ones. If this was the nature of the heretical teaching it would be fully in accordance with all we know of the religious ideas of that time. The conflict of good and evil was everywhere conceived in terms of personal agencies. It was believed that man was surrounded by a world of supernatural powers—some of them on his side, others against him. His safety was to be found in the conciliation of the friendly powers by means of offerings, sacred rites, spells, and talismans, so that they would protect him against the opposing demons.

Paul himself appears to have shared to a great extent in this mode of thought which was common in his time. In all his epistles he frequently mentions the supernatural beings with whom man finds himself in conflict and the need of protection from their enmity (cf. Eph. 6 : 12 ff.). But he insists always that this protection is offered by Christ and that all else is useless. This is the line of thought which he develops most fully in the present epistle. To our minds much of Paul's thinking appears mythological, presupposing as it does a world of supernatural beings and a conflict among them in which we no longer believe. But as has been already suggested, the ancient type of belief differed from our own only in the assumption that the contending powers were personal. We still think of ourselves as held in bondage by iron forces, inexorable laws, in the face of which all our struggles and aspirations are futile. Although the problem of the world presents itself to our modern thought in forms that were never dreamed of by Paul, his main conception is still valid. Through Christ we can reach out, beyond the hostility of all material forces, to a life of spiritual freedom. We have a power on our side which can overcome everything that is against us.

Warning against the Heretical Practices (2 : 16–19)

**16 So let no one take you to task on questions of eating and
drinking or in connexion with the observance of festivals
17 or new moons or sabbaths. All that is the mere shadow
18 of what is to be ; the substance belongs to Christ. Let
no one lay down rules for you as he pleases, with regard
to fasting and the cult of angels, presuming on his visions
19 and inflated by his sensuous notions, instead of keeping
in touch with that Head under whom the entire Body,**

supplied with joints and sinews and thus compacted, grows with growth divine.

Paul has dealt with the 'philosophy' of the false teachers; he now touches on certain features in their religious practice. It is chiefly from these verses that we have to infer the nature of the Colossian heresy, and the indications are slight and vague. Paul has no intention of entering into controversy with the heretics and discussing their views in detail, after the manner of Irenaeus and other second-century Fathers. He merely singles out a few characteristics of the new cult which appear to him quite alien to the spirit of Christianity. Some of the practices he mentions are obviously Jewish; others would seem, just as clearly, to be of Pagan origin. We cannot tell from the brief notices how these various elements were blended, or what form they assumed in the combination. Our difficulty in reconstructing the heresy is all the greater as Paul makes use of its mysterious terminology. Some of this jargon would be barely intelligible to his first readers, and at this distance of time the key to it cannot be recovered. The practices in question were evidently bound up in some manner with the speculations on which the teaching was based.

Having shewn the falsity of these speculations, Paul 16 proceeds: **Let no one** therefore **take you to task on questions of eating and drinking.** One of the chief complaints of the new teachers against ordinary Christian practice was evidently that it failed to observe certain dietary rules. These can hardly have been the specific Jewish rules, for while the levitical law has much to say about food, it is silent on the subject of drink. We indeed hear of sects like the Nazirites and Rechabites to whom wine was forbidden, but this was in consequence of a special vow and entailed a discipline over and above the Law. Since meat and drink are coupled together in the present verse, we must think of a rule which had at most an incidental connexion with Judaism. Its true origin is probably to be sought in the ascetic tendency which had begun to play a part in the religion of the age. A belief had arisen (perhaps through influences which had proceeded by obscure channels from India) that matter was inherently evil. Men who aimed at a higher spiritual life tried to separate themselves as far as possible from all that ministered to physical appetites and needs. In the third and fourth centuries this morbid attitude towards the material life was in large measure adopted by the Church, and found its expression in the monasticism which continued to flourish for more than a thousand years.

There are signs that even in Paul's time an ascetic party was forming within the Church. In Rom. 14 : 1 ff. he deals with dissensions at Rome, caused by members of the Church who had scruples about partaking of any animal food. The writer of the Hebrews alludes, in an obscure passage, to what seems to have been a similar type of practice (Heb. 13 : 9 f.). In Colossae it had appeared in exaggerated form, and was combined with strange beliefs. Along with dietary rules Paul mentions **the observance of festivals** (or holy days), **new moons, or sabbaths.** In this respect the heresy plainly shewed its Jewish affiliations. Three kinds of festival were recognized in Judaism—annual, monthly, weekly. These all, as we can gather here, were adopted by the heretical sect. The reference cannot be to festivals taken over from Paganism, for the new moon and sabbath were distinctly Jewish.

17 On these practices Paul passes his judgment: **All that is the mere shadow of what is to be ; but the substance belongs to Christ.** His meaning is not that they have no reality (shadow as opposed to substance), but that they are at best an anticipation. The emphasis in the verse is on **what is to be ;** of these 'things to come' the other things are types and symbols. Himself a Jew, Paul cannot admit that the most sacred ordinances of Judaism are worthless shadows. His thought is rather that of the writer to the Hebrews, who finds a value in all the ancient ceremonies in so far as they point forward, in a sort of picture-language, to the great consummation (e.g. the Sabbath typifies the perfect rest of God. Heb. 4 : 14). So when he says, **the substance belongs to Christ** ('the body is Christ'), he means that in Christ we

have the reality of which the sacred observances were the prefigurement. The thought is similar to that which has been already expressed in 'Christ in you the hope of glory.' Not by any outward ordinances but by living fellowship with Christ do we lay hold of the glorious hope.

The next verse is famous as one of the chief puzzles in 18 the New Testament. Its obscurities arise almost wholly from our ignorance of the precise nature of the Colossian heresy, and especially of those Pagan elements in its teaching which were mingled with the Jewish. It is evident, however, that Paul here passes from the ordinary practices of the cult (the rules about food and drink and festivals) to the more secret discipline, reserved for the initiates. As he has said 'Let no one criticize you for the neglect of certain formalities,' so now he says, **Let no one lay down rules for you as he pleases,** or 'let no man disqualify you because you have not advanced to the so-called higher instruction.' To describe the attitude of the heretics to ordinary Christians Paul uses a very forcible verb (*Katabrabeuein*), taken from the language of the games. It suggests the action of an umpire who bars out a competitor for a technical breach of rules. The race has really been won, but the victor must retire disgraced on the ground of some arbitrary condition. So the heretics laid stress on their mysterious rites and beliefs, and denied all value to the truest religion in which these were not recognized. One thinks of many narrow sects since which have 'disqualified' the great body of their Christian brethren because of a difference on some recondite point of custom or doctrine. The demands of the self-appointed umpire are now specified. Our translation takes **as he pleases** (*thelôn*) with the preceding verb, but it may be taken with the following nouns thus: 'he takes delight in humility and worship of angels.' The literal words are 'willing (*thelôn*) in humility,' which have given us the translation of the A.V. 'in a voluntary humility.' But there can be little doubt that Paul uses 'willing' with the force which it sometimes has in the Greek version of the Old Testament—'delighting in,' 'insisting on.' One of the chief Christian virtues is humility, and Paul might here seem to rate it slightly or condemn it altogether. But he is evidently repeating one of the watchwords of the heretics, though what they meant by it we can only guess. Our translation interprets it as **fasting.** Since it is coupled with 'worship of angels,' however, we may infer that the heretics held it impious to approach God directly, and that mortal men must show due 'humility.' They must recognize that God in His absolute being is utterly beyond their knowledge and so worship Him through intermediaries in whom His nature is partially reflected. This **cult of angels** appears to have been the characteristic feature of the heresy. Some would understand the phrase in the sense of 'worship offered by angels,' and so render the whole clause 'angel-like humility and worship.' What this might mean it is hard to say, and while the heretics may have held some absurd ideas, we have no right to credit them with pure nonsense. In view of many allusions in the epistle we cannot doubt that the reference is to a **cult of angels,** and that this service of God's messengers instead of God Himself, was set down to 'humility.'

The words that follow constitute the chief difficulty of the verse. Our A.V., accepting a text which is found in many MSS., translates them 'intruding into those things which he has not seen.' It is certain, however, that the 'not' was inserted in very ancient times to make some kind of sense out of words which had already become unintelligible. Our translation offers the meaning, **presuming on his visions.** But some modern scholars, unable to get meaning out of the text as it stands ('intruding or entering into those things which he has seen'), have suspected error on the part of an early copyist, and have made various attempts at emendation. Lightfoot, for instance, by the change of a single letter in the Greek, is able to extract a phrase which means 'airily treading the void.'

But if Paul wrote that phrase he would be speaking in his own person, and we cannot believe that he would express his criticism in language even more obscure and pedantic than that of the false teachers. It may be taken for granted that he is quoting some of their jargon and perhaps quoting it mockingly, much as a writer to-day might pick out a particularly unmeaning phrase from a psychological textbook. Evidence, indeed, is now available that the word which has puzzled all the commentators and which has been set down to a corruption in the text was a technical term for initiation into the Mysteries. It appears in an inscription discovered by Sir William Ramsay at Klaros in Asia Minor in 1912. The priests of the temple certify of someone that, ‘ having received the mysteries ’ (i.e. having undergone the preliminary instruction) ‘ he entered in.’ He had completed his course of probation, and was now admitted to the sacred rites. The word is purposely vague and obscure—but it would seem to denote the act of entering into some inner sanctuary ; and when it is understood in this sense a light is thrown on the strange addition—‘ those things which he has seen.’ We know that in ancient mystery rites the appeal was chiefly directed to the eye. A drama, usually connected with the legend of the divinity, was enacted before the worshipper, and in this manner he was filled with solemn emotions and was admitted to the secret teachings of the cult. So the phrase quoted by Paul may be taken to refer to some culminating rite in which the votary of the new worship attained to his full privilege. By his previous discipline he had been suitably prepared ; he had been granted visions foreshadowing the supreme disclosure. Now he ‘ entered into the things he had seen ’—sharing in some observance by which the final secrets were revealed to him.

Paul has repeated the high-sounding language in which the heretics were accustomed to speak of their teaching ; now he passes his own judgment on it. These men, he says, who make pretence to a higher illumination, are **inflated by sensuous notions,** literally, ‘ by the fleshly mind.’ The wisdom on which they pride themselves is empty imagination, and even at that it has nothing to do with the Spirit ; it springs out of the ‘ mind of the flesh,’ out of a purely material mode of thinking. Paul thus applies to the heretics a word which he often uses to describe shew without substance (e.g. 1 Cor. 8 : 1 : ‘ Knowledge puffs up, love builds up ’).

19 This emptiness of the heretical wisdom is due to the grand defect on which stress is laid throughout the epistle; such theosophists do not keep **in touch with the Head**. By their very nature the new doctrines must be unreal, for they allow no place, or a merely subordinate one, to Christ, in whom all reality is summed up, as the vital forces of the body are concentrated in the head. This analogy is worked out in the words that follow. On Christ **the entire Body** is dependent. Paul may be thinking of the whole sum of truth, or of the Church considered, as in 1 : 18, as the 'body of Christ.' More likely he repeats the thought of 2 : 11, that Christ is the head of all existence. All the life of the universe is bound up with Christ, and being **supplied with joints and sinews and thus compacted, grows with growth divine.**

The language here must be understood in the light of ancient medical science. It was believed that the body was knit into a unity in two ways: (1) by the adhesive contact of one part with another; (2) by nerves and muscles which acted as cords tying the various parts together. Not only did these **joints and sinews** unify the body, but they served as the channels by which its supply of nourishment was distributed. So Christ is conceived as the great principle at once of unity and sustenance. All existence is related to him as the body to the head, and through him increases or grows with the increase of God. The language is here suggested by the reference to 'inflating' in the verse before. The life-giving presence of Christ makes all the difference between an empty inflation and a true growth, such as God intended when He called the world into being.

THE CRITICISM OF THE HERESY CONTINUED (2 : 20–23)

**20 As you died with Christ to the Elemental spirits of the world,
why live as if you still belonged to the world? Why
21 submit to rules and regulations like 'Hands off this!'
22 'Taste not that!' 'Touch not this!'—referring to
things that perish by being used? These rules are
23 determined by *human precepts and tenets*; they get the
name of 'wisdom' with their self-imposed devotions,**

with their fasting, with their rigorous discipline of the body, but they are of no value, they simply pamper the flesh !

Paul has dealt with the worship and doctrines of the false teachers, now he turns to their practical demands. They tried to burden the Christian life with a great number of restrictions, affecting all the details of daily conduct. In this part of their requirements the Jewish influence is clearly traceable. Rules borrowed from the Levitical law were made binding on Christians, and were connected apparently with the *theosophy* or 'philosophy' which had been taken over from Paganism. On this new type of legalism Paul makes the same criticisms as he had already made (in Galatians and Romans) on legalism in its strict Jewish form. In Christ we have died to the Law. He has brought us out into a life of freedom in which the old restrictions are no longer valid. Man's action is to be controlled henceforth by inward motives and stands in no need of rules outwardly imposed.

He begins therefore by referring again to the decisive 20 change which Christians have undergone through the act of baptism, by which they entered on a new life : **as you died with Christ to the Elemental spirits of the world.** As elsewhere, baptism is regarded as a dying with Christ—a repetition in the believer of Christ's death and Resurrection. But instead of describing this death as a dying to sin, Paul thinks of it here as a dying to the angelic powers, whom he calls, as in ver. 7, **the Elemental spirits of the world.** In the present connexion the name has a special fitness, since he wishes to bring out that these powers belong to the material creation —to that lower sphere of things from which Christ set us free when we died with him to the old life.

Paul asks, therefore, **Why live as if you still belonged to the world,** that lower sphere ? Why let yourselves be dictated to ? The thought is that outward **rules and regulations** are part and parcel of the material order. The physical world, as we would now express it, is a mechanism, governed by its fixed laws, and so long as men have no life outside

of it they are subject to a like bondage. All their action must be regulated for them by set decrees. According as creatures rise in the scale of being they enjoy a larger measure of freedom. Plants, with their capacity for growth, are higher than dead matter; animals, moving freely from place to place, are higher than plants; man, with his faculty of will instead of blind instinct, is higher than the beasts. But while he belongs wholly to this world man's will is not truly free. He is governed by his appetites, or by rules prescribed to him to hold them in check. He has no power in himself to choose what is necessary to his higher welfare. Through Christ he comes out at last into a world of complete freedom. The old restrictions fall away as useless and
21 meaningless, and he becomes master of his own life. So Paul repeats mockingly the rules laid down in the false teaching: 'Don't touch this, don't touch that, don't come in contact with that other thing.'

22 These rules are offered as means to some higher condition of holiness, but what do they amount to? They all refer to **things that perish by being used**; indeed, they partake of the nature of those earthly objects with which they are concerned, and which waste away through our using them. The Greek word 'consume' can also mean 'abuse,' and many expositors, both Catholic and Protestant, have tried to make out that it has this meaning here. They argue that what Paul condemns is not a piety directed to outward things but merely the abuse of it. This anxiety to soften the plain import of his words is not a little significant. Even Christian thinkers have been unable to shake off the feeling that some magical value attaches to certain objects and ceremonies. Paul says explicitly that they have no value. His principle is that which was proclaimed once for all by Jesus: 'Not that which goeth in but that which cometh out defileth a man.' He therefore presses his question, 'Why are you dictated to by rules determined by **human precepts and tenets?**' These last words are a quotation from Isa. 29:13, where the prophet laments that the religion of his countrymen is all a matter of custom and tradition. The

same words are quoted by Jesus with a similar purpose in Mark 7 : 7. As Paul applies them they have a double point: (*a*) the heretical rules about food and contacts are worthless in themselves, mere rags of arbitrary tradition; (*b*) they involve a loss of liberty in so far as those who practise them put themselves under bondage to their fellow-men.

The closing verse of the chapter, like ver. 18, is notoriously difficult. No one has yet succeeded in giving a fully satisfactory account either of the separate terms contained in it or of the meaning of the verse as a whole. It may be that the text has come down to us in a corrupt form, or that Paul is again quoting some obscure jargon from the false teachers. Fortunately, there is no important issue depending on the verse. Its interest is mainly that of a puzzle on which grammarians and critics may exercise their ingenuity. 23

(1) The separate difficulties may first be considered. By **the name of 'wisdom'** ('a shew of wisdom'—A.V.) it is implied that all the practices in question are only a solemn pretence. Men have agreed to believe that some profound wisdom lies behind them, but no one knows what it is, for the good reason that it is not there. Something of the same idea is no doubt involved in the curious word which the A.V. translates literally *will-worship*. It marks the form of piety affected by the heretics as chosen by themselves without any ground for such **devotions** in the nature of things or in the will of God. The idea of something **self-imposed** ought probably to be taken with the next term also. Our translation renders it, as in ver. 18, by **fasting.** But Paul, who there referred to humility as one of the virtues on which the heretics prided themselves, now distinguishes this 'humility' from the genuine thing; it is a 'self-devised humility,' consisting in servile subjection to a number of meaningless rules.

The same idea may possibly extend to the third phrase, **rigorous discipline of the body.** Mastery of the bodily appetites is itself a virtue—the necessary beginning of all Christian excellence. Paul tells, in 1 Cor. 9 : 27, that he 'buffets the body and keeps it under,' but the severe mortification enjoined by the false teachers had no moral purpose. It was supposed to have merit for its own sake, and was connected with purely fanciful notions about man's life and the nature of the world. So Paul concludes his criticism with words which have never been satisfactorily explained. The A.V. renders them, 'Not in any honour to the satisfying (for satiety) of the flesh.' Do these words connect with those immediately preceding, or with ver. 21 or ver. 22? What is the meaning of the phrase 'not in any honour'? What, above all, is implied in the closing words 'for satiety of the flesh'? The phrase 'in honour' has probably to be taken in the sense 'of value.' Paul has condemned the heretica practices, and declares that **they are of no value**, for the only purpose that might justify them. The nature of this purpose is a riddle. A word is employed which can have either a bad or a good sense—'satisfaction' or 'surfeit.' It is used, too, with a preposition which may imply either to assist or to prevent. Our choice between these alternatives will depend on the meaning we attach to the sentence as a whole.

(2) When it is taken in this larger way Paul's criticism appears to say just the opposite of what we should expect from the context. He is condemning the heretical rules as spiritually worthless, but now he goes on to object that they 'are of no value for the satisfaction of the flesh.' He appears to turn suddenly round and declare that spiritual aims are not everything; the body has its legitimate claims, and the heretics deny them by maltreating it. Some scholars have fallen back on this explanation, but it would be strangely out of keeping with the general tenor of the passage and of the epistle as a whole. Paul had little sympathy with the idea expressed in a once-popular hymn:

> Religion never was designed
> To make our pleasures less.

If the effect of the heretical teaching had been merely to interfere, in some degree, with the physical comfort of the Colossians, he would hardly have troubled himself, on the eve of his martyrdom, to warn them against it. So there is much to be said for the translation suggested by Lightfoot and adopted in the R.V., ' of no value against the indulgence of the flesh' (taking the preposition in the sense it often bears in medical prescriptions—a remedy against some ailment).

Paul's objection to the heretics, however, is not that they failed to mortify the flesh, but that they were wrapt up wholly in the lower material side of life. He would have equally opposed them if they had succeeded in curbing all bodily desires, and had accomplished nothing more. For that part it has often been observed that the same type of religion which runs to asceticism may fall, just as easily, into the opposite extreme. When the attitude to the bodily life is essentially morbid, it is pretty much a matter of accident whether you practise an ascetic rigour or a gross sensuality. Probably the best interpretation of the debated words is that which takes them as loosely appended to those which have gone before: ' things of no value—serving only for fleshly satisfaction.' The false teachers made a great deal of petty rules and restrictions—attributing some mysterious spiritual worth to those formalities. Paul asserts that such things have nothing to do with the spiritual life. They have no effect whatever, or if they have it is only to minister to the flesh. They simply pamper the flesh! Their professed object is to lift men out of the lower life, while in point of fact they only plunge them into it more deeply—concentrating all thought and effort on purely material things.

The Real Nature of the Spiritual Life (3: 1—4) iii.

Since then you have been raised with Christ, aim at what is 1
above, where Christ is, ***seated at the right hand of God*****;** 2
mind what is above, not what is on earth, for you died 3
and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, 4
who is our life, appears, then you will appear with him
in glory.

Paul has now exposed the false doctrine, shewing that with all its high pretensions it is earth-bound, and had nothing to contribute to the real ends of religion. The aim of the gospel is to raise men above the lower interests altogether and make them partakers of a higher kind of life. By rising with Christ his followers share in his mind and will; they enter with him into a new world of spiritual values. This passage therefore is preparatory to the more practical section of the epistle. As against the heresy Paul sets forth the true meaning of the gospel, and then proceeds to shew how men must give effect to it in their ordinary lives.

1 He first reverts to the idea which he touched on in 2 : 12, that in baptism the Christian has risen with Christ and has thereby come under a new set of obligations. He has interrupted his train of thought to deal with the heretical teaching, but now takes it up again and dwells on these obligations which rest upon us as Christian men. **Since then you have been raised with Christ.** When he thus refers to the change which takes place at baptism he is not thinking of the sacramental rite but of the change itself. No doubt he believes that the act of baptism marks a great division in a man's life; from that moment he has done with his sinful past and belongs to Christ. But he never exalts the baptismal rite into an object of reverence for its own sake. His mind is occupied with the inward experience which it represents; in baptism a man unites himself with Christ, dies with him, and rises into a new life. So he reminds his readers of the obligations which they placed on themselves by baptism; **aim at what is above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.** He has shewn how the heretics, with all their profession of a superior wisdom, were absorbed in the lower material things. Christians had become citizens of the higher world, for Christ, with whom they are now united, had ascended into heaven to share in the life of God.

This thought is expressed in the words of the 110th Psalm, which was accepted in the early church as the cardinal messianic prophecy. Jesus himself, according to Mark 12 : 35–37, had so employed it, and references to it are found constantly in the New Testament. The whole argument of the epistle to the Hebrews is based on this Psalm. Paul takes from it the one idea that Jesus, as the Messiah, is now throned in the higher world, and from this he reasons that Christian men must live for those spiritual things which have eternal value. His thought is similar to that in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' Only, Paul gives a characteristic mystical turn to the simpler idea of Jesus. Not only have Christians laid up their treasure in heaven, but they have already entered on the heavenly life. Through their union with Christ they belong to that higher world in which he now lives and reigns.

The idea is repeated with a different emphasis in the next 2
verse; **mind** (be intent on) **what is above, not what is on earth.** Not only their several actions but their whole will and disposition must be conformed to that heavenly world to which, through Christ, they now belong. **For you died and** 3
your life is hidden with Christ in God. Paul has previously spoken of baptism as a dying to the old life, and it has sometimes been supposed that here he is carrying out that imagery: 'You died with Christ, and now your old life is buried.' But the life **hidden in God** must evidently be the new heavenly life. The thought must be, 'You parted with your old life in baptism, and now a new life has been born in you, but as yet it is hidden.' Since it is one with the life of Christ (cf. Gal. 2:20, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me') it can be described as **hidden with Christ in God.** A mystical application is here given to the words of the 110th Psalm which have just been quoted. Not only does Christ sit **at the right hand of God,** but he has withdrawn into the divine nature. His life has become one with the life of God, and as his people we also dwell in God.

Paul thinks of this divine life in which we share as something hidden. Looking at the actual condition of Christian men he cannot deny that they seem in no visible way to be different from others. They are subject to the same needs, are beset with the same limitations. None the less, he believes that even now there is a profound difference between the Christian and other men. The idea is thus similar to that which finds expression a number of times in the Fourth Gospel: 'They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world'; 'I in them and thou in me; . . . Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am' (John 17:16, 23, 24).

4 This mystical conception, however, is combined with the primitive hope in the nearness of the return of Christ. Paul, as we know from his earlier epistles, strongly entertained the hope, and at one time believed that he himself would be among the survivors who would greet Christ at his coming (cf. 1 Thess. 4:15, 1 Cor. 15:51). In his later days, when he came face to face with the prospect of martyrdom, he no longer dared to cherish this hope (cf. Phil. 1:20 f.); but he was still confident that the Lord's return would not be long delayed. Christ, who was now hidden in heaven, would soon be manifested, and his people would then **appear** in their true character, since their life had become one with his life. It is doubtful whether this epistle was known to the author of 1 John, but the same thought is there repeated more explicitly, 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2).

This verse in 1 John throws light also on the words **you will appear in glory.** It is Paul's belief that Christians, by the act of faith, enter already on the immortal life, but on earth their true condition is obscured by the body of flesh. The great change which Paul expects from the future is the substitution for this earthly body of a 'spiritual body' which will correspond more adequately with the new nature. Christ 'will change our corruptible body and make it like to his body of glory.' It is this change from the earthly body to a 'spiritual body,' composed of some ethereal substance akin to light, on which Paul insists in his great chapter on immortality (1 Cor. 15). The Lord's coming will be the signal for this change. Those who have died and are 'sleeping,' and those who survive until the great day, will alike undergo this glorious change.

WARNING AGAINST HEATHEN VICES (3:5–11)

5 **So put to death those members that are on earth: sexual vice, impurity, appetite, evil desire, and lust (which is idolatry),**

things that bring down the anger of God on the sons of 6
disobedience. Once you moved among them, when you 7
lived in them ; but off with them all now, off with anger, 8
rage, malice, slander, foul talk ! Tell no lies to one 9
another ; you have stripped off the old nature with its
practices, and put on the new nature which is renewed 10
in the likeness of its Creator for the knowledge of him.
In it there is no room for Greek and Jew, circumcised and 11
uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free man;
Christ is everything and everywhere.

Paul has said that by the baptism in which they died with Christ they have broken with the old life. To make his meaning plainer he specifies a number of the sins they had practised as heathens, without any clear consciousness that these things were evil. This dark chapter of their history now lies behind them. They must realize fully that they have become new men, and cast off everything left over from their heathen past.

5 The opening words of the passage are typical of a line of thought which Paul, in view of his theological assumptions, is often compelled to follow. He believes that Christ by his death destroyed the principle of sin. It ought therefore to be impossible for those who have become one with Christ to commit sin ; they have received a new nature, from which the evil impulses have been eradicated. Yet in face of the obvious facts Paul cannot but admit that the sinful principle is still active. He sees that Christian men, who have passed into the new life through baptism, are subject as they were before to passions which were presumably destroyed in their dying with Christ. He is always trying to overcome this difficulty. Sometimes he falls back on his doctrine that the higher life, though present, is not yet entirely free. Christians have inwardly become spiritual men, but are still entangled in earthly conditions ; the flesh interferes with their true will, and they cannot enter into their full liberty until they have exchanged this material body for the spiritual one (cf. Rom. 8 : 23, ‘ Waiting for the adoption, even the redemption of

our body '). His usual method, however, of escaping from the difficulty is that which he adopts here. **So put to death those members that are on earth.** The Christian has died to sin ; he must try to be worthy of his new condition. Ideally he is a new man ; he must become in actual fact what he is ideally.

The force of this motive cannot be denied. We still say of the erring Christian that he is not living up to his true self. In the struggle with evil we find strength in the knowledge that there is a better nature in us which must not be defeated. Yet the inconsistency in Paul's thinking is apparent. He is working with an abstract theological idea which does not fit in with the facts of life, and in his effort to assert it he is involved in constant trouble. In the present account of sins that must be discarded along with the old life he thinks of them as resident in the various members of the body, and lays particular stress on two classes of sin—impurity in its various aspects, and covetousness. Again and again these two sins are singled out by Paul, not only as characteristic of the old life, but as the typical sins of the Gentile world. All our knowledge of that age in which he lived bears out Paul's estimate of its besetting evils. Perhaps we might add cruelty, as exemplified in the slave system, the games of the amphitheatre, and the tortures inflicted on enemies and prisoners. But Paul would include this vice in what he here calls **lust** or ' covetousness '—a word which in Greek has a much wider meaning than its English equivalent. It denotes not merely avarice, but the self-seeking temper of which avarice is only one of many aspects. Perhaps we might translate it by such a word as ' egoism.' It implies the desire to have more than one's share of everything—the deliberate choice of one's own interest and pleasure as the governing motive of life.

Paul's description of it as covetousness **which is idolatry** has occasoned much difficulty. The two things are entirely different, and yet they seem here to be identified. One explanation is that worldly possessions may be regarded as the chief rival to God in man's allegiance. Jesus himself acknowledges this in his well-known saying, 'You cannot serve God and mammon.' Others lay stress on the fact that idolatrous worship in the ancient world was chiefly directed to the hope of material gain; but if Paul were thinking of these worldly aims for which the Pagan worshipper sought the favour of his god, would he not rather have said 'idolatry which is covetousness'? Probably the true explanation is to be found in a Hebrew mode of speech which enforced the gravity of an offence by assimilating it to one which everyone would recognize as a very serious one. A familiar Old Testament example is, 'Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,' which does not mean that it in any way resembles witchcraft, but simply that it is just as great a sin. A number of examples from Rabbinical literature are collected by Strack and Billerbeck in their *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament.* So the meaning of this much-debated verse would appear to be that '**lust** or covetousness is as bad as idolatry.' Paul expresses his repugnance to this sin by comparing it to that which to Jewish sentiment was the most deadly of all.

With regard to all the sins he has named, he adds that
they **bring down the anger of God.** This theme is developed 6
with tremendous power in the first chapter of Romans (Rom. 1 : 18 f.) where Paul describes the punishment which has come on the heathen world through its vices. He shews how the anger or wrath of God is revealed most of all in the utter corruption of all right instincts among the heathen. By lust and selfishness they have wrought themselves into a condition of moral atrophy—the most hopeless condition into which men can fall. (It will be noted that no place is given here to the words **on the sons of disobedience,** which have been transferred to this place from Eph. 5 : 6, and are only to be found in inferior texts.)

The next verse is valuable for the light it throws on the work achieved by the early Christian mission. After naming
the worst heathen vices, Paul says, **Once you moved among** 7
them, when you lived in them, i.e. in that earthly sphere where you had no other interests but those of the flesh.

The verse may be taken along with 1 Cor. 6 : 9–11, where Paul also makes it clear that many of his converts had been reclaimed from the most degraded sections of Pagan society. This must always be borne in mind when we find him insisting on moral duties which might seem obvious to the very dullest Christian intelligence. He was dealing with people whose powers of thought were often highly developed, and to whom he could offer profound theological arguments, but whose ethical sense, owing to their heathen past, had hitherto been
8 unawakened. So he bids his readers here strip off all that belongs to the merely sensual life. First of all he enumerates vices which find their outlet in speech : **anger, rage, malice, slander, foul talk** (or insults). The common mark of all these is not only that they proceed out of the mouth, but that they spring from a bitter temper towards others—they
9 express that 'egoism' which he has just condemned. On one of those sins of speech he lays a special emphasis : **tell no lies to one another,** for in falsehood more than in anything else we manifest the wrong will towards our fellow-men.

What he demands, however, is not a mere reform of certain evil habits or tendencies, but a complete change of nature, from which all the separate improvements will follow of their own accord : **you have stripped off the old nature with**
10 **its practices, and put on the new nature.** This comparison of a spiritual change with the changing of a garment is frequent with Paul (cf. Rom. 13 : 14, Gal. 3 : 27, 1 Thess. 5 : 8). Some would explain it from the practice, which was observed in the Mystery religions, of clothing the initiate in a sacred robe, symbolizing the new condition on which he was now supposed to enter. A similar custom was possibly followed in Christian baptism. But the image employed is a natural one, and does not call for any recondite explanation. In all times a change of status has been marked by the putting on of a new sort of dress. A magistrate is installed by the act of vesting him in official robes ; the soldier puts on a uniform ; we change daily into different clothes according to the business or pleasure to which we set ourselves. So the Christian puts on **the new nature,** i.e. the new self. The

thought is that of an entire renewal of will. In one sense the renewal is effected once for all, but in another it is a never-ending process—**the new nature, which is** (keeps being) **renewed.**

The same idea is expressed almost in the same words in 2 Cor. 4 : 16 (' though our outward man perishes, our inward man is being renewed day by day '). The thought is that through the union with Christ the Christian has a power within him which keeps his life always fresh and unsullied. One is reminded of the beautiful fancy of Swedenborg, that the angels, looking on the face of God, grow daily younger instead of older. The renewal is **in the likeness** (or image) **of the Creator, for the knowledge of him.** Paul has been dwelling throughout the epistle on the need for right knowledge. Here he declares, what he has taken for granted in the previous discussion, that the knowledge is not merely intellectual, it depends on an inward renewal of man's nature. It is, in fact, the crowning result of this change into a new life. Thus Paul reverts to the story in Genesis of the creation of man in the image of God. He says that the new self which the Christian puts on is nothing else than the true nature, as God intended it to be at the beginning. Earlier in the epistle Christ himself was called **the likeness of God,** and the phrase here (**the likeness of Him who created it**) has sometimes been taken to mean ' in the likeness of Christ.' No doubt this is implied, but the immediate thought is that of a restoration of man's fallen nature. The Christian attains ever nearer to that ideal of man which was in the Creator's mind.

Paul started by exhorting his readers to put away the 11
base passions which belong to the old nature. But as he speaks of the new nature, formed after God's own likeness, to which they may attain through Christ, another thought comes to him. **In it** (i.e. in that new realm of Christian manhood) **there is no room for Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free man.** As he has dwelt before on the besetting heathen vices of sensuality and selfishness, so he is now reminded of another

ugly characteristic of the Roman world of his day. It was broken up by arbitrary distinctions of many kinds which set men against their fellows. There were racial differences like those of Jew and Gentile, religious differences, lower and higher cultures; above all, the great class division of slave and free. Such differences, in spite of our Christian civilization, still persist, but in Paul's day they cut much deeper. It was assumed as a self-evident fact that between different nationalities or social groups there could be nothing in common. The Latin proverb passed without question, 'Man is a wolf to his fellow-man.'

In face of this general sentiment of his time Paul asserts that all these distinctions are artificial. Men are all made in the image of God, and the more they approach the true ideal of their nature the nearer they approach each other. On that higher plane of life to which Christ seeks to lift them, they do not represent particular interests and groups, but simply that likeness to God in which they all share. The passage recalls a similar one in Gal. 3 : 28, but the thought is somewhat different. In the Galatian passage Paul says that faith in Christ has abolished the old distinctions; in Colossians he says in effect that the distinctions have never really existed, for as men come to realize their true nature they discover that beneath all differences they are one. In Galatians, too, Paul carefully selects the three great lines of cleavage—race, status, sex. In Colossians he speaks generally of all the things that divide men from each other—race, religion, varieties of culture, social position. '**Barbarian** and **Scythian**' are not contrasted like the other three pairs. They seem to be mentioned only as examples of the nicknames by which different peoples are wont to shew contempt of one another. For the Greeks all foreign races were 'barbarians.' For the nations grouped within the Roman empire all foreign races were 'Scythians.' Such antagonisms have no meaning when Christ is 'all and in all' (A.V.). This phrase may signify that in all men alike the service of Christ is the one thing that matters, but more probably it means simply **Christ is everything.**

THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE NEW LIFE (3 : 12–17)

**As God's own chosen, then, as consecrated and beloved, 12
be clothed with compassion, kindliness, humility, gentleness, and good temper—forbear and forgive each other in 13
any case of complaint ; as Christ forgave you, so must you
forgive. And above all you must be loving, for love is the 14
link of the perfect life. Also, let the peace of Christ be 15
supreme within your hearts—that is why you have been
called as members of the one Body. And you must be
thankful. Let the inspiration of Christ dwell in your 16
midst with all its wealth of wisdom ; teach and train one
another with the music of psalms, with hymns, and songs
of the spiritual life ; praise God with thankful hearts.
Indeed, whatever you say or do, let everything be done in 17
dependence on the Lord Jesus, giving thanks in his name
to God the Father.**

Paul has spoken of the practices which belong inherently to that old nature from which we have been set free by Christ. He now shews that in the new life these must give place to behaviour of quite a different kind. In this exquisite description of the Christian life emphasis is thrown on two things—the spirit of love that should unite all Christians, and the elevation of thought and feeling which should be the habitual mood of all who call themselves by the name of Christ.

First of all the readers are reminded of the high calling 12 which has laid on them obligations they are bound to honour. **As God's own chosen, as consecrated and beloved.** The terms are taken from the Old Testament, where they are applied to Israel in its ideal vocation as the people of God. It is implied that this vocation has now been realized in the Christian church. The three terms all signify the same great fact under different aspects. Through Christ his followers have become in full reality God's children, beloved by Him, and set apart from the world. They are to shew, therefore, by their actual life that they have attained to this privilege.

Be clothed with (put on) **compassion, kindliness, humility, gentleness, and good temper.** Reverting to the image in ver. 9, Paul thinks of exchanging one garment for another, in token that the character has likewise been changed. He also reverts to his list of heathen vices in ver. 8, and says that in the Christian life these must give place to their opposites. The words which he uses all describe the sweet disposition as against the bitter, self-assertive one. **Good temper** or 'longsuffering' is a favourite word with New Testament writers; it denotes something more than the good temper which we chiefly associate with a happy natural constitution. The Christian virtue involves an attitude of soul. Christ's follower has the same outlook on life as he himself had, and can bear patiently with misunderstanding and offences.

13 This is brought out in the words that follow: **forbear and forgive each other**; if anyone has a complaint against any, **as Christ** (or the Lord) **forgave you, so must you forgive.** The Christian, it is implied, is to have in himself something of the nature of Christ. Accepting Christ's gift of forgiveness he is also to share in that forgiving will which prompted the gift. The reference does not appear to be to the earthly life of Christ, for in this case the word 'you' would be out of place; moreover, the title 'the Lord' (which is almost certainly the right reading here) is applied to Christ risen and exalted. Paul appeals not to our knowledge of Jesus as he lived on earth, but to the experience we have of him in our own lives. At the same time we can discern here, as in almost all Paul's references to Christ, the impression which the gospel story had made on him. There may, indeed, be something more than a general reminiscence. In the idea that men, who have been forgiven so much, ought to forgive one another, we seem to catch an echo of the parable of the wicked steward (Matt. 18 : 23 f.). The whole thought of the passage, too, recalls the petition in the Lord's Prayer, 'Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.' It has sometimes been pointed out as remarkable that Paul never makes an allusion to the Lord's Prayer, but we can hardly doubt,

with a verse like this before us, that it was familiar to him. He gives us, however, the other side of the petition in the prayer. Jesus had said that we have no right to ask for God's forgiveness unless we on our part have the forgiving spirit. Paul says that this spirit is born in us through our experience of the divine forgiveness. Those who have learned through Christ how God is willing to bear with them will know how to bear with one another. Still following his image of putting on a new garment he proceeds : **And above all you must be loving, for love is the link** (or 14
bond) **of the perfect life** (or perfectness). It is tempting to see in ' bond ' a literal application of the image. As the other virtues represent various parts of the Christian attire, so love is like the girdle which holds together and ' perfects ' all the rest ; without the girdle of love all the other garments are useless. This may be Paul's meaning, but elsewhere he calls love a **link** or bond in the sense that it unites the people of Christ in a common service. So it is probably better to take **above all** as meaning ' in addition to all,' and to understand the **perfect life** as the perfect fellowship which ought to exist among Christian men. He has spoken of humility and long-suffering, but it is possible to exercise such virtues in a mere spirit of duty. Everyone has known men and women who have faithfully carried out the Christian requirements and yet have remained hard and suspicious. The Christian life, as they exemplify it, repels instead of attracting.

Paul reminds us that the one thing needful is the loving spirit. Without this all efforts to promote a true fellowship will be ineffectual. That he is thinking of Christian 15
unity seems apparent from the next words : **Also, let the peace of Christ be supreme within your hearts—that is why you have been called as members of the one Body.** By the **peace of Christ** is meant the peace given by Christ (cf. John 14 : 27 : ' Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you '). This peace, which, in Paul as in the New Testament generally, is regarded as one of the chief gifts of Christ, has two sides—reconciliation with God and friendship with our fellow-men.

Its place in the Christian life is defined by an expressive word which can hardly be translated in English ; **be supreme** is literally 'act as umpire,' i.e. in all disputes and differences it must rule or give the final decision. The idea seems to be that, however well disposed men may be to one another, there will always be causes of friction. Families, churches, groups of friends are in danger of breaking up from disagreements which can hardly be avoided while human nature remains as it is. But when there is the will to peace the differences can always be overcome ; there will be a readiness to give and take which will avert all quarrels. Since Christians are called to be members of one body they are meant to exercise this peace-loving temper, inspired by Christ. They form a communion of brethren, and this fact alone should remind them of the one condition on which they will be able to live in harmony. As he closes his account of the virtues necessary to Christian fellowship Paul again takes occasion to add, **and you must be thankful.** This recognition that all things are ordered by God for our welfare is to be ever present in the mind of the Christian.

16 The exhortation now takes another turn. Not only do we owe duties to one another but we must keep our own personal life on the higher plane. Thackeray has somewhere described Dr. Johnson on one of his evening walks 'with his mind, we may be sure, full of wise, kind thoughts, for they were always with him.' It is the mark of a good man that you can thus count on his goodness. You cannot break in on him at any casual moment but you will find him thinking or acting as a Christian ought to do. So Paul tells his readers, in the words of the A.V., 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.' Perhaps (as Moffatt suggests by his rendering, **the inspiration of Christ**) he conceives of an inward voice, always counselling and directing us. More likely the reference is to the Christian message, which ought to be so deeply implanted in the believer's mind that it will control all his thinking. Religion for Paul is not an interest by itself but the living power behind all other interests. So he speaks of the message as dwelling in us **with all its wealth of wisdom ;**

it has guidance and strength to offer us in all the manifold business of life.

Since the Christian lives always on the higher plane his mood finds its natural utterance in song. Paul bids his readers express themselves thus in their fellowship together : **teach and train one another with psalms, with hymns, and songs of the spiritual life.** We have many indications that a large place was given to psalmody in early Christian worship. Much of the singing was evidently spontaneous. Someone in the meeting would be suddenly stirred by an emotion which would break out of its own accord into rhythmical language to the accompaniment of a rude tune. These primitive **hymns** would for the most part be of little value—the product of the moment and forgotten as soon as it was past. We are to think of them as resembling the ' spirituals ' which are thrown out, under similar excitement, at a negro camp-meeting. Sometimes, however, a snatch of real poetry would find voice in this manner and would fasten itself in the memory and be often repeated. There can be little doubt that a number of those **hymns** which had become familiar are quoted in the New Testament, and one of the finest of them will meet us in Eph. 5 : 14.

Paul seems here to distinguish between several kinds of Christian song, though it may be that he is only describing the same thing in different words. If the terms are to be pressed, **psalms** may refer to regular poems, modelled on the Psalms of the Old Testament (cf. the songs in the first chapter of Luke and the book of Revelation) ; by **hymns** we may understand ascriptions of praise to Christ (Pliny tells the emperor in his famous letter that the Christians hold meetings, ' where they sing a hymn to Christ as to a divinity ') ; **songs of the spiritual life** evidently include all kinds of lyrical utterance, especially those unpremeditated outbursts which were supposed to come directly from the impulse of the Spirit. It is possible that the epithet **of the spiritual life** should be taken with all three nouns ; for the heightened emotion which could only find an outlet in musical language was attributed to the Spirit, moving in the heart of the believer. For this reason the words 'with grace' (as in A.V.) cannot mean simply 'with poetic charm,' as some would have us take them. Paul is thinking of a religious and not a merely aesthetic mood. Perhaps he means **with thankful hearts** (as in Moffatt's translation), or perhaps 'under the influence of God's grace.' The main thought in this whole passage on Christian psalmody is contained in the closing words about praising God with the heart. Paul is not concerned with the literary or musical merit of the Christian singing. All that matters is the heartfelt devotion which is present in the believer and utters itself in his song.

17 So in the verse which closes this exhortation Paul dwells on the higher motive which must control all Christian action. **Whatever you say or do, let everything be done in dependence on** (literally, in the name of) **the Lord Jesus.** Some would take this in a quite literal sense. In all that he does the Christian is to invoke the name of Jesus, thereby assuring his presence and help. The ancient mode of thought ascribed to a name much of the value which is still attached to it among primitive peoples. The name stood for the personality. It was believed that by uttering the name you somehow made the person present. Ancient magic turned chiefly on this idea of the power which could be exercised by the naming of supernatural beings. Religion, likewise, assigned a mysterious value to the name of the divinity, and in not a few religions the true name was kept secret lest irresponsible persons might use the power of the god for their own evil purposes. There are signs that in New Testament times the name of Jesus was sometimes employed as a sort of spell or talisman. But it would be contrary to the whole spirit of the present passage to assume that Paul alludes to the mere superstitious naming of Jesus. He evidently means to summarize what he has said already: 'Live as Christ's people, deriving all your impulses from that higher will which is yours through him.' We still express the same idea when we speak of a magistrate acting 'in the name' of the king or the law. In himself he is an ordinary person, but

he represents a supreme authority, and in this sense we must accept his word or act. So Paul impresses on his readers that the will of Jesus is to find expression in all that they say or do. Once more he closes with the note of thankfulness. The Christian is to carry with him into all his action an abiding sense of God's goodness, **giving thanks to God the Father.** This he can only do **in the name of** (i.e. through) Christ—so uniting himself with Christ that he will possess his mind and outlook.

THE ORDERING OF THE HOUSEHOLD (3 : 18–4 : 1)

Wives, be subject to your husbands ; that is your proper 18
duty in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, do not be 19
harsh to them. Children, obey your parents at every 20
point, for this pleases the Lord right well. Fathers, avoid 21
irritating your children, in case they get dispirited. Serv- 22
ants, obey your masters here below at every point ; do not
work simply when their eye is on you, like those who
court human favour, but serve them with a single heart
out of reverence for your Lord and Master. Whatever be 23
your task, work at it heartily, as servants of the Lord and
not of men ; remember, you will receive from the Lord the 24
inheritance which is your due ; serve Christ your Lord and
Master, for the wrongdoer will be paid back for his wrong- 25
doing—there will be no favour shown. iv.
Masters, treat your servants justly and fairly ; remember 1
you have a Master of your own in heaven.

Christianity has in no way effected a deeper change in the world's life than by placing the family on a new basis. The family is the fundamental social unit, and the remodelling of it meant nothing less than the reconstruction of human society in its whole extent. It has to be admitted that the Christian conception of the family was in no small degree an inheritance from Judaism, which had always been distinguished for its care in maintaining and developing the natural affections. Not only all social arrangements among the

Jews but all religious observances were based on the family which had thus come to have a significance which it had among no other people. But while Jesus took over the Jewish conception he deepened and purified it by his new law of marriage. Still more he changed all relations within the family by his insistence on the rights of every human personality and by the new meaning which he gave to fatherhood and brotherhood. Later Christian thinkers, and especially Paul, worked out the conception of family life which was implicit in the teaching of Jesus. The rules which are laid down in the present section reappear, in much the same form, in Eph. 5 : 22 f., and 1 Pet. 2 : 13 f.

The passage seems to come in rather abruptly. It is customary with Paul, towards the close of his epistles, to point out the bearing on practical duties of the principles he has discussed theologically. Why does he here confine himself to duties which have their field of exercise within the household ? It may be that owing to his want of personal acquaintance with conditions at Colossae he did not care to enter on those more definite problems which he can deal with freely when writing to his own churches. He feels that he will be on safe ground if he confines himself to those family obligations which are sure to be the same at Colossae as everywhere else. But probably he has a more special reason. His mind had been much occupied with the case of Onesimus, the runaway Colossian slave. He had been thinking out the relation between masters and servants, and had thus been led to consider the question of the family as a whole. It is noticeable that the greater part of the section is devoted to the mutual obligations of masters and servants.

18 First of all, then, he deals with the relation of husbands and wives, on which the whole life of the family must be founded. It is to be noted that here, as in his treatment of the other relations, he is careful to lay stress on reciprocal duties. This was the great Christian innovation in the law of the family. Judaism, like all the ancient religions, had assumed that all the rights were on one side and the duties on the other. Christianity insisted that wives, children,

servants had their rights as well as husbands, parents, and masters. Addressing himself first to the wives Paul bids them **be subject to your husbands ; that is your proper duty** (literally, as is becoming) **in the Lord,** i.e. in a Christian home. Probably he has in his mind certain false interpretations which had been placed on Christian liberty, and which had brought the new religion into disrepute. Many Christian women were making a bid for 'emancipation' and were neglecting household duties and decent conventions with the notion of making themselves 'free in the Lord.' This must always be remembered when Paul is blamed for his attitude to women, which now strikes us as a little overbearing. One of his hardest problems was to maintain his doctrine of liberty and yet resist the wrong and mischievous constructions which were often placed on it. From the wives he turns 19 to the husbands : **love your wives, do not be harsh to them** (literally, 'do not be bitter,' i.e. surly and discontented).

In addressing parents and children Paul likewise insists 20 on a reciprocal duty. **Children, obey your parents at every point, for this pleases the Lord right well.** It is difficult here to find an exact translation for the alternative and elusive reading, 'this is well pleasing in the Lord.' Paul's meaning is perhaps that the natural sentiment as to filial duty agrees with the Christian one. God had laid down the commandment 'honour thy father and mother' and now 'in the Lord'—in that new order which is ruled by Christ—the will of God is the same. Parents, however, have likewise their 21 duty : **avoid irritating your children, in case they get dispirited** (or lose heart). Paul assumes that a firm discipline is necessary, but he warns against the nagging and fault-finding which he had observed too often on the part of unwise parents. The effect of this, he says, can only be to discourage. Children subjected to it will come to feel that whatever they do will be blamed, and they will go about all their tasks in a listless, perfunctory spirit.

On the relation of masters and servants Paul speaks at 22 greater length, partly, no doubt, because the problems involved are much more difficult, and partly, as has been suggested, because the case of Onesimus was occupying his mind. He is dealing, we must remember, with the ancient system which made the servant the property of his master. The objection has often been raised that while his counsels, so far as they go, are just and wise, he does not denounce the system itself as wrong. This matter will fall to be discussed in connexion with the epistle to Philemon, and it is here enough to say that although he does not condemn the system (for this, under the condition of ancient society, could only have led to mischief) he lays down the principles which were finally to destroy it. His effort is to Christianize the relation of master and servant; and when it was thus transformed, the institution of slavery was bound to disappear.

22 He bids the servants render entire obedience to their **masters here below**, i.e. their lords on earth as contrasted with their true Lord in heaven. They are to work not only when the master's eye is upon them, as looking only for man's approval, but **with a single heart.** The word implies the absence of all base, self-seeking motives, and is sometimes used in the New Testament for liberality. Perhaps this meaning is suggested here. Although they must do servile labour the slaves are to rid themselves of the servile mind. They have it in their power to be generous by going through their labour cheerfully and spontaneously. The best commentary on the words is Paul's account of his own conduct in 1 Cor. 9 : 15–18. He there tells that he was bound to preach the gospel whether he would or not, but in order to preserve his inward sense of freedom he made a point of doing the work for nothing. So here he impresses on the slaves that when they willingly do what they must do, they throw off the outward constraint and become free men. They work not as for an earthly master but **out of reverence for the Lord**—the **Master** in heaven. One thinks of Milton's line (apparently suggested by this verse):

> 'As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.'

23 The thought is repeated with a new emphasis in the next verse: **Whatever be your task, work at it heartily, as servants**

of the Lord and not of men. Paul's aim is to change the slaves inwardly. To be sure, their outward condition will remain the same, and he recognizes the injustice of compelling men to do honest work without reward, but he tells them that work done in the Christian spirit will not go unrewarded. **You will receive from the Lord the inheritance which is your** 24 **due**—consisting, that is, of the eternal life which God has laid up for His people. It has sometimes been objected that Paul seeks to reconcile the slaves to this world's injustice by bidding them look forward to some imaginary recompense in the future. To this he would doubtless have answered that the only real reward a man can work for is that which he 'receives from the Lord.' Without the consciousness that by your earthly labour you have won something for the enrichment of your own soul, all other payment amounts to little.

Thus he concludes: **serve Christ your Lord and Master, for** 25 **the wrongdoer will be paid back for his wrong-doing—there will be no favour shown.** It is difficult to say whether the reference here is to the master or the slave. At first sight it might seem as if Paul is trying to console the slave for the ill-usage he too often received, even when he had done his best to render faithful service. 'If your master is unjust, do not doubt that he will be punished; God deals equally with all men.' But more probably the warning is directed to the slave, with whom Paul has been dealing all through the passage. 'Do not think,' he says, 'that God will overlook evil-doing because you do it as a slave who cannot help himself.' The worst of slavery was that it killed the sense of moral responsibility. Whatever wrong the slave was guilty of he could always reflect that in his condition it could not matter; he would not be judged as if he were a free agent. Paul's aim is to awaken manliness in the slave, and the first thing necessary was to make him feel that he was responsible, as much as any other man. In this sense, too, the phrase **there will be no favour shown** is best understood. The slaves were full of the idea that Christ, as the champion of the weak, would be sure to side with them whatever they did. They are reminded that Christ is a just judge. He will be stern to wickedness, and apply the same measure to every man.

iv.

1 Turning to the masters Paul is much briefer in his admonitions. In the case of the masters he does not have to reckon with that rankling sense of injustice which made it difficult to offer Christian counsel to the slaves. It is enough to tell them that they must treat their servants **justly and fairly.** The latter word means literally 'with equality,' but it is not implied that the difference in status should be disregarded. The idea is rather that of holding a balance even. The masters are to shew no favouritism, and never to act out of mere whim or hasty temper. Above all, they are to know that they also **have a Master in heaven.** This is the safeguard against all abuse of power, as it is against mean and dishonest service. The masters are to realize, like the centurion whom Jesus praised, that they are 'men under authority'—responsible to a higher Lord for the power entrusted to them over their fellow-men.

GENERAL COUNSELS (4 : 2–6)

2 **Attend to your prayers, maintain your zest for prayer by**
3 **thanksgiving ; and pray for me as well, that God may**
give me an opening for the word, to speak of the open
4 **secret of Christ for which I am in custody. Pray that I**
5 **may unfold it as I should. Let Christian wisdom rule**
your behaviour to the outside world ; make the very most
6 **of your time ; let your talk always have a saving salt of**
grace about it, and learn how to answer any question
put to you.

Paul is now nearing the close of his letter, and adds a few counsels of wider application, leading up to what he has to say about himself and his circumstances and plans. First of
2 all he impresses on his readers the need of prayer. **Attend to** (be insistent in) **your prayers**: it is a strong verb, implying at once an earnest spirit and an incessant use of prayer, even when it seems to be unanswered. Another vivid word is

added; **maintain your zest for prayer,** or rather 'keep watchful in prayer.' The suggestion (as in 1 Thess. 5 : 6) is that of a constant spiritual alertness. This word ('gregorein') of Paul's gave rise in early Christian times to a favourite proper name, 'Gregory.' As he touches on the subject of prayer Paul takes occasion once more to bring in the idea of **thanksgiving.** This should be the pervading mood of the Christian life, and above all should supply the key-note to all prayer. Paul also takes this opportunity to make a 3 request for himself and his associates (Timothy and Epaphras?) that they should be remembered in the prayers of the Colossian church. It is characteristic of him that he does not ask prayers for deliverance from his present dangers and hardships, but only for the continuance of his work; **that God may give an opening for the word.** Elsewhere (cf. 1 Cor. 16 : 9) he uses this same image of an open door, and it also appears in Rev. 3 : 8.

We know from Phil. 1 : 12–14 that even in prison Paul found these 'doors' opened for him. He talked about the gospel to the soldiers who guarded him, to people like Onesimus who sought his charity, to members of the Roman church who visited him. Those closing years, when he seemed to be shut off entirely from his active work, were by no means the most unfruitful in his life. Indeed, when he speaks here of the Christian message **for which** he was fettered **in custody,** he shews himself conscious that his testimony counts for more than it ever did. Though he could no longer travel among his churches, they were all aware of what he had suffered, and his sacrifices for the cause gave it a new significance. Once again he describes the gospel as **the open secret** (or mystery) **of Christ.** If this consists in the divine plan of admitting the Gentiles to the promised salvation, Paul will here mean that he is in prison because he has been the apostle of this larger gospel. But the word, as we have seen, seems rather to denote God's hidden purpose to save men through Christ. We may therefore translate 'the mystery consisting in Christ'—in his life and death and the saving will of God which they revealed.

4 The Colossians are asked to **pray that I may unfold it as I should.** This idea of disclosing the gospel is suggested by the description of it as a ' mystery,' or open secret. Everything in Paul's language seems to make it clear that he is not thinking of some side-issue like the admission of the Gentiles, but of the whole content of the message—the unsearchable riches of Christ.

5 After the exhortation to prayer he touches on a wise Christian behaviour towards those who are outside the Church. The words recall the saying of Jesus, ' Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.' Paul, however, thinks of this discretion as exercised particularly in relations with Pagan neighbours. It is noticeable that in almost all his epistles Paul shews this anxiety that his converts should have a due regard to outside opinion. His motive is not merely the prudential one of saving them from the slander and persecution to which they were always subject. He recognized that the most effectual missionaries of Christ were not the official evangelists, but the ordinary men and women who mingled with their fellows and exemplified the new teaching in their lives. Perhaps, too, he had a definite reason for laying stress on this need for Christian discretion.

Among the Christians there were many well-meaning people who felt it laid on them to denounce all Pagan customs—in season and out of season—with the result that they set the world against them. Much of the popular prejudice against Christianity was due to this fanatical behaviour on the part of ignorant Christians. Paul wishes the heathen to be attracted to the gospel, not repelled from it, and this is probably the key to the next words, which, literally translated, are ' buying up the critical interval ' (' redeeming the time '—A.V.). The term used is one which denotes a crisis or emergency, and is commonly applied in the New Testament to the brief period which is to elapse before the return of Christ. In the corresponding passage of Ephesians (5 : 16) this is plainly signified by the addition, ' because the days are evil.' The words do not bear the merely general sense of **make the very most of your time** ; the meaning is rather, 'do not forget that you are living in a momentous time, of which every minute is precious. No opportunity of putting the gospel in a true light is to be wasted. If men are to be won to Christ before he comes to judgment it must be done now.'

A similar idea is involved in the next counsel: **let your** 6
talk always have a saving salt of grace about it. Here, as in 3:16, **grace** has sometimes been understood in the sense of beauty or charm, and this meaning might seem to be confirmed by the phrase, 'seasoned with salt.' In ordinary Greek this metaphor was often used for sparkling conversation, and has passed into our own language in the phrase 'Attic salt.' Paul, however, has more to do than advise his readers that they should cultivate a witty turn in their conversation. He purposely makes use of phrases current in his time about the art of talking brightly on common things, and gives them a higher application. The **grace** which is to mark the language of Christians is the grace of God. The **salt** with which they are to flavour their talk is not literary allusion and epigram, but the spirit of the gospel. In other words, he desires his readers even in their ordinary intercourse with their heathen neighbours to lead them in some way to higher things. They are not to bore their friends with pious platitudes, and yet in everything they say they should reflect the Christian way of thinking. How this may be done is explained in the words that follow: **learn how to answer** each particular man. The Christian is to proclaim himself even in his common talk, but due regard should be paid to place and time and person. If the conversation is to have its due effect it must be tactful. There is a way of adapting one's language to the spirit of the moment, and yet, by a casual remark or even a jest, of lifting men's thoughts to a higher level.

INTRODUCING THE MESSENGERS, TYCHICUS AND ONESIMUS
(4:7–9)

Tychicus, that beloved brother and faithful minister and 7
fellow-servant in the Lord, will give you all information

8 **about me. The reason why I am sending him to you is that he may ascertain how you are, and encourage your**
9 **hearts. He is accompanied by that faithful and beloved brother Onesimus, who is one of yourselves. They will inform you of all that goes on here.**

The letter to Colossae, along with several others, was entrusted to Tychicus, who was to be accompanied on his journey to Asia Minor by the slave Onesimus, whom Paul was restoring to his master. He desires that these friends of his should be duly welcomed, and leaves them to convey all the personal information which he has not had leisure to put into writing.

7 All that we know of Tychicus is that he was a native of Asia Minor who had accompanied Paul on the visit to Jerusalem which ended with his arrest (Acts 20 : 4). He had apparently attended Paul to Rome, and was now returning to Asia on private business or in the interests of the mission. Paul describes him as his **beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-servant.** The word **minister** probably implies that he acted as Paul's assistant. He had not the full rank of apostle, but served in subordinate offices for the carrying on of the mission. Paul hastens to add, however, that while Tychicus has a secondary place he regards him as his equal,
8 his **fellow-servant** in the work of Christ. He says further that he is sending Tychicus for this very reason 'that you may know my circumstances and that he may **encourage your hearts.**' This does not mean that Tychicus is making his long journey for the sole purpose of carrying messages to Colossae. We know that he was also to visit other churches, and his errand to Colossae was probably incidental to his main object. All that is intended is that he is going there at Paul's special request. He was bound, perhaps, for Ephesus, but was to run through to Colossae for the one purpose of taking these messages.

According to the best MSS., we should read 'that you may learn about my affairs' (not **that he may ascertain how you are**). This seems also to be required by the context.

Tychicus was not going to Colossae to make inquiries, but to carry a message and give information. In this sense we must understand the further words **and that he may encourage your hearts.** The Colossians were feeling anxious about Paul, and perhaps about their own missionary, Epaphras; they would get news from Tychicus which would in some measure put their minds at rest. A significant sentence is 9
added about Onesimus, who would return to Colossae in Tychicus' company. Paul is writing a special letter on his behalf to his master, Philemon, but takes occasion here to commend him in cordial terms, as a **faithful and beloved brother,** to the whole Colossian church. It is worth noting the delicate feeling with which Paul avoids any direct request that Onesimus should be pardoned and reinstated. He simply introduces him as he might do any other Christian friend of whose honourable standing there is no doubt.

CLOSING SALUTATIONS (4 : 10–18)

**Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner salutes you ; so does Mark, 10
the cousin of Barnabas, about whom you have got in-
structions (if he comes to you, give him a welcome) ; 11
and so does Jesus who is called Justus. These are the
only comrades in the work of God's realm, belonging to
the circumcised, who have been any comfort to me.
Epaphras, who is one of yourselves, salutes you—a 12
servant of Christ Jesus who is always earnest in prayer for
you, that you may stand firm like mature and convinced
Christians, whatever be the will of God for you. I can 13
testify to his exertions on your behalf and on behalf of
those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. Our beloved Luke, 14
the doctor, salutes you ; so does Demas. Salute the 15
brothers at Laodicea, also Nympha and the church which
meets at her house. And when this letter has been read 16
to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodi-
ceans ; also, see that you read the letter that reaches you
from Laodicea. And tell Archippus, 'Attend to the 17
ministry you have received in the Lord ; see that you
fulfil it.'**

18 **This salutation is in my own hand, from Paul. 'Remember I am in prison. Grace be with you.'**

Paul takes occasion to convey the greetings of the various friends who happen to be with him. It is mainly on the evidence of this passage that many modern scholars have based the theory that the epistle was written not from Rome but from Ephesus. The names mentioned are those of men who were associated with Paul during his Ephesian period. Moreover, the fact that he mentions them at all would seem to indicate that they were known, at least by reputation, to the Colossian church. If they were connected with the mission at Ephesus, only 100 miles away, their names would pretty certainly be familiar, but would the Colossians have cared to hear about a number of unknown men, whom Paul had met at Rome? So it is argued. We must remember, however, that the Church in Paul's day was a small community, the more prominent officers of which were known to their brethren everywhere. There are denominations to-day made up of a few thousands of people which take an intense interest in their own church life, and if one of their leaders wrote from London to Melbourne or Vancouver he would name his associates as Paul does here, confident that their names would be recognized. We may assume, too, that Paul singles out the names which he knows will be of special interest to the Colossians.

10 First he mentions **Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner** and **Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.** We hear of Aristarchus several times in the book of Acts, where we learn that he belonged to Thessalonica (Acts 19 : 29, 20 : 4). Paul refers to him as a fellow-captive, which may simply be a picturesque way of saying that he was a fellow-Christian. More likely the word has a more definite meaning ; Aristarchus was not under arrest like Paul, but he had volunteered to share his captivity, just as he had been his companion during the closing years of his mission. Mark is called **the cousin of Barnabas**, but the word is one which covers a number of relationships, and may possibly mean 'nephew.' It was over Mark that Paul had quarrelled with Barnabas, who had

continued to trust his young relation after his failure at the first trial. Barnabas had been right in his judgment, and in later years Paul had evidently become fully reconciled with Mark, who also receives honourable mention in 1 Pet. 5 : 13. There is no reason to doubt that he was the Mark who, according to Christian tradition, wrote down the discourses of Peter, and whose name was attached to our Second Gospel. Paul refers parenthetically to certain **instructions** which his readers received about Mark—to the effect that if he came to them they were to welcome him as an accredited messenger. It seems unlikely that Paul himself had sent these instructions, for he indicates in the present letter that he is communicating with Colossae for the first time. We may conjecture that he throws in this note at the request of Epaphras, who wishes his converts to be reminded of some message he had sent them.

Along with Aristarchus and Mark, Paul includes **Jesus who** 11
is called Justus, who is mentioned only here. Like Paul himself he bore two names, one Aramaic and another, similar in sound, for use in the Gentile world. Of the three friends whom he has named Paul says, with a note of bitterness, that they are the only fellow-servants **belonging to the circumcised, who have been any comfort to me.** His complaint is set forth more fully in Phil. 1 : 15, 16, where he tells that many are preaching Christ in a factious spirit, animated largely by ill-will to himself. These personal enemies would doubtless belong to the Jewish Christian party, which had always regarded him with suspicion. He feels the more gratitude to the three he has named—Jews like the others—who have yet thrown aside their old prejudices and devoted themselves with a single heart to the Realm or Kingdom of God. This term, so familiar in the Synoptic Gospels, occurs very seldom in the writings of Paul. Perhaps he employs it here in order to enforce his point against the Jewish brethren, who were far more interested in their own racial privileges than in the larger Kingdom which Christ had proclaimed.

Paul naturally gives a prominent place to the greetings of 12

Epaphras, **who is one of yourselves.** Stress is laid on his true service for Christ and on his devotion to the Colossian Christians, for whom he is **always earnest** (literally, wrestling) **in prayer that you may stand firm.** The next words we render, ' complete and fully persuaded in every will of God.' Moffatt's translation, **whatever be the will of God for you,** is somewhat ambiguous. Paul does not mean that through all the changes of life the Colossians are to keep their faith. His thought is rather that they should have such a clear knowledge of God's will, such a firm grip of every truth of the gospel, that no efforts of the false teachers will ever shake them. At the close of the epistle he thus glances back at its main object.

13 While speaking of Epaphras he adds a notice which is now obscure to us. **I can testify to his exertions on your behalf and on behalf of those at Laodicea and** those at **Hierapolis.** The reference is apparently to some particular task in which Epaphras is engaged, a task which has brought him to Rome. What the task was, we can only guess. It may have been to appeal against some injustice to which the Christians in the Lycus valley were exposed. Or perhaps it was to raise money in view of some emergency. It is tempting to read here a passing allusion to the great earthquake which must have happened just about this time, and on which Paul is so strangely silent throughout his letter. The historian Tacitus tells us that financial help was offered on a large scale to the afflicted cities, adding that Laodicea, with an admirable spirit of self-reliance, declined it. Epaphras may have come to Rome to enlist the sympathy of wealthy Christians for their brethren who had lost everything in the great disaster.

14 A peculiar interest attaches to the mention of **Luke,** the author, according to a tradition which cannot be reasonably doubted, of the Third Gospel and the book of Acts. In the account of Paul's travels which we owe to him he never brings in his own name, but a number of passages are written in the first person plural (' we departed,' etc.), shewing that for considerable periods he was in Paul's company. He had gone up with him to Jerusalem, and had apparently remained

with him after his arrest. He had shared the voyage to Italy and the shipwreck, and was still with Paul on the arrival at Rome. (The mention of Luke in this chapter is incidentally a strong argument for the traditional view that the epistle was written from Rome; for while we know from Acts that Luke went to Rome, there is no indication that he shared Paul's work at Ephesus. No section of Acts, indeed, is more lacking in first-hand knowledge than that which deals with the events in Ephesus.)

It is from the present reference that we know Luke to have been a physician. His long and close association with Paul was doubtless due to this fact. The apostle, as he himself tells us, suffered constantly from ill-health, which would be aggravated by his imprisonment; and the company of a physician, well-acquainted with his peculiar ailment, would be necessary to him. Owing to the translation in the A.V., 'the beloved physician' has become a current phrase in our language. Paul's words, however (as Moffatt rightly indicates), ought to be rendered, 'Luke, the physician, the beloved one, greets you.' Just as in ver. 7 he has described Tychicus as a **beloved brother,** he now describes Luke. With the name of Luke he couples that of Demas, who is also mentioned in Philem. 24. In 2 Tim. 4 : 10 Demas is referred to with some bitterness as one who had stayed with Paul for some time and then had forsaken him, 'having loved the present world,' i.e. having gone back to worldly business. Bunyan has seized on this allusion and introduced Demas into the *Pilgrim's Progress* as the type of the half-hearted Christian who goes a certain way and turns back. But since the authenticity of the Pastoral epistles is more than doubtful, we cannot be sure that Demas deserved the stigma which has been attached to his name. Certainly Paul places him here in honourable company, as one of his devoted friends. At the same time, even if the passage in 2 Tim. was not directly written by Paul, it may be taken to reflect a tradition which had lingered in the Church. Demas, for some reason or other, had left a dubious reputation behind him.

After transmitting these various greetings Paul sends 15 greeting in turn to people whom he knew in Colossae and the neighbouring towns. **Salute the brothers at Laodicea, also Nympha and the church which meets at her house.** It is doubtful from the MSS. whether the Nympha or Nymphas here named was a man or a woman. The latter seems more probable, and since she is named in connexion with Laodicea we may set her down as a lady of that city. She must have been of good social position, with a house large enough to serve as the meeting-place of one of the groups into which the church in a large city was divided (cf. Rom. 16 : 5, 1 Cor. 16 : 9, Acts 12 : 12). We need to remember that the Church at this time owned no buildings. Ordinary meetings could be held in the open-air, or on the roof, or in the courtyard of a large house. For celebrations of the Lord's Supper or other meetings which required space and privacy, it was necessary to divide the community into those smaller groups.

16 The next verse is of great interest for the history of Christian literature, and especially for the conditions under which Paul's epistles were written and circulated. Directions are given that when the Colossians have read the present letter they are to **see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans ; also see that you read the letter that reaches you from Laodicea.** Three things may be gathered from this notice : (1) The letters of Paul were intended to be read at the public meetings of the Church (cf. a similar indication in 1 Thess. 5 : 27). In one sense they were private letters, but they were meant to be read out to a large gathering. They bore the character of addresses as well as of letters, and from this point of view we must understand the studied eloquence with which many passages in them are written. (2) They were intended from the first for a wider circulation. Certainly Paul never imagined that the whole world would be reading these letters of his twenty centuries after his death. Yet it is wrong to imagine him as throwing them off casually, in the belief that only a handful of people would look at them and then forget that they were ever written. He meant at least that they should be passed round in the neighbouring churches and perhaps in churches more distant. Probably

he foresaw that the people who received them would have them copied and preserved. (3) There is a clear intimation here that when Paul wrote his letter to Colossians he wrote at least one other letter, which he expected to reach Colossae by way of Laodicea. What became of it? According to one theory it is now lost, and this is quite possible. There is good reason to believe that the correspondence of Paul which we now possess represents only a fraction of all that he wrote. For that part we have several indications of lost letters. One of them is referred to in 1 Cor. 5 : 9 ; a fragment from another is probably included in 2 Cor. 6 : 14–18 ; during the trouble with Corinth Paul wrote a 'painful letter,' of which we know nothing ; extracts from several lost letters seem to be embedded in the Pastoral epistles. There would be nothing surprising, therefore, in the complete disappearance of the letter mentioned here.

According to another theory, it was our present epistle to the Ephesians. Those who regard Ephesians as a circular letter, intended for a number of churches, lay stress on the peculiar phrase **the letter from** (not 'to') **Laodicea** ; they conceive of the circular letter as passing on its round, and finally reaching Colossae by way of Laodicea. This, however, is to read too much into the preposition. It merely implies that Paul had instructed the Laodiceans as he now does the Colossians, to send over their letter, when they have read it, to the neighbouring church.

The greetings close with a sort of after-thought: **Tell** 17 **Archippus, 'Attend to the ministry you have received in the Lord ; see that you fulfil it.'** From Philem. 2 we gather that Archippus was of the family of Philemon, probably his son. He held some particular office in the Colossian church, of what kind we are not told. Perhaps he was in charge of the affairs of the church during the absence of Epaphras. This would account for the curious roundabout fashion in which the instruction is conveyed. His position was a temporary and unofficial one, and the members of the church were jointly responsible with him for all that might be done in the interval. They are therefore exhorted to keep him up to the mark.

18 A final salutation is added in Paul's own hand. It was his habit to dictate his letters—perhaps owing to some physical infirmity, perhaps because his mind worked more freely when he was not distracted by the manual act of writing. With ancient writing materials this act was much more laborious than it is now, and it seems to have been the regular custom to dictate letters whenever this was possible. It was Paul's practice, however, to add a few closing words in his own hand with his signature attached. He had been annoyed, as he tells us in 2 Thess. 2 : 2, by unauthorized letters which came to his churches from time to time, purporting to state his views. As a precaution against this misuse of his name he had made the rule that no letter should be accepted as his unless the final **salutation** was written by himself (2 Thess. 3 : 17). Usually, it consists in a few words of benediction ; in the strongly personal letter to Galatians it runs to a long paragraph, enforcing the main plea of the epistle. Here, after the formal signature, Paul makes a brief and touching allusion to his own circumstances : **'Remember I am in prison,'** 'be mindful of my bonds.' He uses a verb which he commonly applies to remembrance in prayer, and this is doubtless his meaning. As in almost all his letters, he concludes with a benediction, but it appears in briefer form than anywhere else. Perhaps there was room left on the paper for only two or three words. Perhaps he found as he wrote that even this slight exertion was painful to him. So he contents himself with this shortest of blessings : **'Grace be with you.'**

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO PHILEMON

INTRODUCTION

BESIDES his epistles to churches Paul must have written a great number of private letters. In each of his communities there were men and women with whom he had personal friendships, and he was frequently separated for long intervals from his assistants, and had to instruct them by means of letters. This portion of his correspondence has been almost entirely lost. The letters would deal for the most part with matters of private interest and would often be confidential in their nature. He may himself have given directions that they should not be circulated or preserved. A few fragments of this personal correspondence may be embodied in the Pastoral epistles; but the only complete letter of the kind which we now possess is the epistle to Philemon. It has thus a unique value as a revelation of the character of Paul. In itself, too, it is one of the most beautiful letters ever written, and though it contains hardly anything that is directly theological, our knowledge of Paul's teaching would be vastly poorer without it.

From the long doctrinal epistles it has often been inferred that Paul had changed the religion of Jesus into an arid doctrinal system, but as we read Philemon we can see that this view is altogether false. Paul had indeed thought deeply on the theological implications of the gospel, but behind all his doctrines was that new conception of life which had been set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.

The letter to Philemon was entrusted to the same messenger as the epistle to Colossians, and must have been written at the same time. We are not expressly told that Philemon belonged to Colossae, but this is apparent from the mention in Colossians of Onesimus as **one of yourselves** (Col. 4 : 9), and of Archippus, a member of Philemon's household, as a leader in the Colossian church (Col. 4 : 17). Paul speaks repeatedly of his warm attachment to Philemon (vers. 7, 17, 21), but even apart from these references we can gather from the cordial and informal tone of the letter that he is writing to an old friend. Since he had never visited Colossae he must have formed this friendship elsewhere—most probably in Ephesus.

Philemon was evidently a well-to-do man, who was able to keep servants and entertain the church in his house and act as a public benefactor. Such a man would often be travelling, and would doubtless have business connexions with the capital city of the province. Paul was acquainted not only with Philemon but with his family, and sends his greetings to Apphia and Archippus, whom we can hardly be wrong in assuming to be Philemon's wife and son. It would appear from Col. 4 : 17 that Archippus was more prominent in the church at Colossae than Philemon himself. We may think of Philemon as a warm-hearted Christian man who preferred to remain in the background. In ecclesiastical affairs he took little direct interest, but was always at hand when there was need for practical helpfulness.

The sole purpose of the letter is to make a request to Philemon on behalf of his slave Onesimus. Philemon had always found him an unsatisfactory servant, and finally he had run away, after robbing his master, as Paul plainly hints, of a considerable sum of money. He had found refuge presumably in Rome, as fugitive slaves were wont to do, and had there fallen in with Paul. Since Paul was a close prisoner he must himself have sought him out. We can well conceive that finding himself destitute and in danger he had bethought himself of the one man in the strange city of whom he had some previous knowledge. It is a striking tribute to Paul's character and to the impression he made on all who had met him, however casually, that the hunted slave should thus have turned to him. Through Paul he was converted, and henceforth attached himself to the prisoner as his personal attendant. He made himself so useful that Paul would fain have kept him, but it seemed only right, when Tychicus was going to Colossae, to send Onesimus along with him and restore him to his master.

The purpose of the letter is to beg forgiveness for the slave and at the same time to ensure that he would be received on the footing of a true Christian brother. It must have been a difficult letter to write. Paul had to seek pardon for one of the most serious offences known to ancient law. He had to excuse his own presumption in detaining another man's servant so long. He had to avoid all appearance of dictation, which would have irritated his friend and probably have defeated his purpose. The charm of the letter consists not only in its tenderness but in the marvellous delicacy with which all the difficult points are handled. We have no definite information that the letter was successful, but this may be inferred from the very fact that Philemon preserved it. He would never have done so unless he had not only granted its request but had also perceived, as the world has done since, that it was a priceless memorial of the great apostle.

Apart from the light it throws on Paul's personality the epistle is chiefly valuable for its treatment of the question of slavery. Paul has often been blamed because he did not protest, in the name of the gospel, against this radical evil of the ancient world. In Philemon, as in other epistles (e.g. Col. 3 : 21–4 : 1, 1 Cor. 7 : 21–24), he is content to accept slavery as part of the existing order, and requires that slaves should submit to their lot and do their duty faithfully as unto Christ. For the understanding of this attitude of Paul several things must be borne in mind :

(1) It was necessary for him to avoid direct criticism of social and political institutions. By attacking them he would have effected nothing, and would only have exposed his mission to danger as a revolutionary movement. It is easy to see, too, that a campaign against slavery, even if it had any chance of being successful, would have resulted in positive mischief. The whole economic system was based on this institution and would have been utterly ruined by any violent change.

(2) Paul was expecting Christ to return almost at once to establish the Kingdom of God. He took for granted that

the whole present order of things, with slavery as part of it, would then come to an end. It was therefore needless for the slave to make any effort to secure his liberty. His one endeavour should be to make sure of his calling as a Christian man, so that he might participate in the coming Kingdom. For all ranks and conditions Paul laid down the same rule as for the slaves, that they were not to distract themselves by worldly change from the religious duty which was now so urgent. 'Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God' (1 Cor. 7 : 24).

(3) Although he raised no agitation against slavery Paul did more than any other man to put an end to the evil system. He insisted that the slave, as much as his master, was the servant of Christ, and must therefore respect his own personality and live by a higher law. He sought to make the slave inwardly free, so that the attainment of outward freedom should be only a matter of time. We can now see, as a matter of historical fact, that it was this assertion of the spiritual equality of all men which eventually destroyed the old system. When the slave in his inner nature became free, the fetters gradually fell away from him of their own accord.

The epistle to Philemon must therefore be regarded as one of the landmarks in the history of emancipation. It is all the more significant as it contains no open protest against the social order of the time. Paul takes the position that all real change must be effected from within. While restoring Onesimus to his master he sends him back as a new man, transformed in his will and character by the power of Christ. He is confident that by thus emancipating his spirit he has put him in the true path to freedom.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO PHILEMON

SALUTATION (1–3)

Paul a prisoner of Christ Jesus and brother Timotheus, to 1
our beloved fellow-worker Philemon, to our sister Apphia, 2
to our fellow-soldier Archippus, and to the church that
meets in your house : grace and peace to you from God 3
our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The letter begins with the customary formula, which is expanded, as in Paul's other epistles, and interwoven in each of its parts with Christian ideas.

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and brother Timotheus. 1 As in Eph. 3 : 1 and 4 : 1 Paul speaks of himself as Christ's prisoner. He wishes to suggest not merely that he has suffered imprisonment while working in Christ's cause, but that Christ himself has laid this affliction on him for purposes of his own. It is no doubt with a special object that he mentions his imprisonment at the beginning of the present letter. He is writing to beg a favour, and knows that his request will carry more weight when his friend remembers that he is suffering hardship in the cause that is dear to them both. According to his custom he adds the name of one of his companions to his own. There is no further reference to Timothy, and the letter is intimately personal. But he no doubt consulted Timothy before he wrote it, and perhaps adopted one or two of his suggestions. Timothy was a well-known figure in the churches of Asia Minor, and Philemon would be acquainted with him, and would pay more attention to a letter in which his name was conjoined with Paul's.

To our beloved (or dear friend and) **fellow-worker Philemon,** 2 **to our sister Apphia, to our fellow-soldier Archippus, and to the church that meets in your house.** We do not know where or in what circumstances Paul and Philemon had become friends. It may be inferred from the manner in which he is here addressed that at some time Philemon had worked along with Paul, probably in some business connected with the church at Ephesus, which was not far from Colossae. Apphia was apparently Philemon's wife and a Christian like himself (as is indicated by the title **our sister**). Archippus is mentioned in Col. 4 : 17 in terms which suggest that he was in charge of the church at Colossae during the absence of Epaphras. In addressing him as **fellow-soldier** Paul compliments him on the part he is taking in the common cause. The same term is applied to Epaphroditus, with the same suggestion, in Phil. 2 : 25. It may be that the name of Archippus is included for no other reason than that he was, for the time being, the responsible leader in the Colossian church, and courtesy seemed to require that he should be mentioned. But his name is so closely connected with those of Philemon and Apphia that we can hardly avoid the inference that he was their son.

Not only was Philemon the head of a Christian family, but his house was a Christian meeting-place. We hear a number of times in Paul's epistles of these house-gatherings into which the church in a given locality was divided. It must be remembered that as yet the Church possessed no buildings, and its assemblies had all to take place in private houses. The communities were small at the best, and there would usually be a large room available, in the house of some wealthier member, where all could be accommodated at the regular services. But for meetings where space was necessary (the Lord's Supper, the Love-feast, classes for instruction), the Church was broken into smaller groups, attached to separate houses. These were miniature 'churches' by themselves. The community at Colossae must have been fairly large, since it had to be divided into those smaller
3 groups, one of them meeting in Philemon's house. The salutation closes with the actual words of greeting : **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** In place of the conventional 'joy' Paul wishes **grace** to his friends, adapting the Greek word to its Christian meaning. He also combines the Greek form of salutation with the Jewish

one—here too suggesting that the peace he desires for them is that which comes from the knowledge of God in Christ.

THANKSGIVING (4–7)

I always thank my God when I mention you in my prayers ; 4
for as I hear of your love and loyalty to the Lord Jesus 5
and to all the saints, I pray that by their participation in 6
your loyal faith they may have a vivid sense of how much
good we [1] Christians can attain.
I have had great joy and encouragement over your love, my 7
brother, over the way you have refreshed the hearts of
the saints.

Still following the model of an ordinary Greek letter Paul gives thanks for the continued welfare of those whom he addresses. Again he gives a Christian character to the usual good wishes. Instead of rejoicing that Philemon is in good health and prosperous circumstances, he thanks God that he remains strong in faith and manifests his faith in a life of practical goodness.

I always thank my God when I mention you in my prayers ; 4
as I hear of your love and loyalty to the Lord Jesus and to all 5
the saints. He gives Philemon to understand that while it is long since he met him personally he has constantly been hearing of him and has heard nothing but good. This is more than a polite form of speech, for Epaphras must have had much to say about Philemon and his family, while Onesimus, too, would speak frequently of his old master. All through the letter Paul's object is to incline his friend favourably towards the unfortunate slave, and perhaps he is hinting here that Onesimus had carried no malicious stories. In spite of the quarrel he had admitted that Philemon had behaved always like a consistent Christian man. The reference to ' love and faith ' (A.V.) as directed both to Christ and

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[1] Reading ἡμῖν instead of ὑμῖν. As Lightfoot observes, ' scribes would be strongly tempted to alter ἡμῖν into ὑμῖν from a misapprehension of the sense, and a wish to apply the words to Philemon and his household.'

to fellow-Christians comes strangely from Paul, who always regards Christ as the one object of faith. Perhaps he uses the word here (*pistis*) in its wider meaning of **loyalty.** Or, writing in his usual condensed manner, he may have intended to say 'faith in Christ and love towards the saints.'

6 He has spoken of the prayers which he had offered for Philemon, and now proceeds to tell what he had prayed for: 'that the communion of your faith may become effectual in the knowledge of all the good that is among us with regard to Christ.' This is by far the most difficult sentence in the epistle, and has been explained in many different ways. Our understanding of it must chiefly depend on the meaning we give to the word 'communion' (*koinonia*), which is used in the New Testament in a variety of senses. It can denote: (1) sharing what we have with others; (2) fellowship with the brethren; (3) communion with Christ. The difficulty of explaining the word is well illustrated by the familiar phrase in the Benediction: 'the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the holy Spirit.' Does this mean participation in the Spirit, or the communion with one another which comes through possession of the Spirit?

In the term 'communion' as applied to the Lord's Supper there is something of the same ambiguity, though in this instance the word is no doubt intended to convey the two meanings—communion with one another and with Christ. In the present verse, then, Paul may be speaking (1) of **participation in your faith.** He has just expressed his joy in Philemon's faith, and now prays that it may be imparted by him to others, so that many may attain to fuller knowledge of Christ. Or (2) he may refer to nothing more than the liberality which Philemon had always shewn, and by which he had manifested his **love to the saints.** In this case the phrase would mean, 'the generous giving which is the outcome of your faith.' Or (3) the idea may be 'your sharing in the common faith.' Paul would thus emphasize the fact that Philemon's faith was all the stronger because he was at one with the Christian brotherhood. He had learned 'to comprehend with all saints' the greatness of the love of Christ (cf. Eph. 3 : 18). Or (4) Paul thinks of a communion with Christ which arises from faith. It is in this mystical sense that Paul most generally uses the word ; e.g. 1 Cor. 1 : 9—'God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son.' In this introductory prayer, too, he is concerned with Philemon in his personal religious life. It seems best, therefore, to take the prayer as meaning 'that your fellowship with Christ by faith may become operative in knowledge.' Paul had written in the companion letter to the Colossians that our life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3 : 3). It is only hereafter that the full significance of fellowship with Christ will be manifest, but even now it exerts an influence on all thought and action. More especially it is the condition of all deeper spiritual insight.

The epistle to Ephesians culminates in the thought of this new knowledge that is born in us when 'Christ dwells in our hearts by faith' (Eph. 3 : 17–19). The knowledge is here defined as 'knowledge of every good thing that is among us with regard to Christ.' If our interpretation so far has been correct, this will mean that among us (i.e. in the Christian church) there is a wealth of blessing of which the world knows nothing. All these good things—faith, love, courage under trial, assurance of a glorious future—are inseparable from Christ. The whole verse may be paraphrased : 'I pray that the faith which unites you with Christ may have its outcome in the vital possession of all the good which Christ bestows on his people.'

Thus far Paul has rejoiced in Philemon's 'faith in Christ' 7
(ver. 5). Now he turns to that **love to all the saints** which he had mentioned along with it. **I had great joy and encouragement over your love.** Paul evidently has in mind some particular instance of the kindness for which Philemon was distinguished. It must have been a signal act of beneficence, for he takes for granted that the allusion to Philemon refreshing the hearts of the saints will be at once understood. From Paul's language we may infer that the whole church at Colossae had benefited by the action ; and one is tempted to see a reference here to the great earthquake which must have

happened about this time, and which gave wealthy men an opportunity to relieve the public distress. This, however, can only be conjecture.

The Petition for Onesimus (8–14)

8 **Hence, although in Christ I would feel quite free to order you**
9 **to do your duty, I prefer to appeal to you on the ground**
of love. Well then, as Paul the old man, who now-a-days
10 **is a prisoner for Christ Jesus, I appeal to you on behalf of**
11 **my spiritual son born while I was in prison. It is**
Onesimus ! Once you found him a worthless character,
but now-a-days he is worth something to you and me.
12 **I am sending him back to you, and parting with my very**
13 **heart. I would have liked to keep him beside me, that**
as your deputy he might serve me during my imprisonment
14 **for the gospel ; but I did not want to do anything without**
your consent, so that your goodness to me might come of
your own free will, without any appearance of constraint.

Paul now approaches his special request, but before saying what it is he takes care to make Philemon willing to listen to it favourably by reminding him of what is due to both of them—to Paul as an apostle and to Philemon himself as a
8 man of generous nature. **Hence, although in Christ I would feel quite free** (literally, ' I have much freedom in Christ ') **to order you to do your duty** (or ' to enjoin on you what is fitting '), **I prefer to appeal to you on the ground of love.** The ' freedom in Christ ' to which Paul lays claim was his right as an apostle. In various places in his letters he alludes to the large powers enjoyed by the apostles. They were regarded, in no merely metaphorical sense, as Christ's ambassadors, who acted in the name of their Master, and whose orders were to be obeyed as coming from him. More than once Paul tells us that he had purposely refrained from using his power, trusting rather to persuasion and to the deep respect and affection with which his churches looked up to him as to their spiritual father. He relies on that moral authority here as he reminds Philemon of what is ' fitting,' i.e. the sort of conduct which becomes a

Christian. He feels that with a man like Philemon he can rest his **appeal on the ground of love.** The appeal has the more force in view of the previous verses. By all his actions Philemon has shewn himself a big-hearted man, on whose kindness all Christians have learned to depend. In this present matter he must live up to his character.

There is yet another motive which will give weight to the petition: since I am no other than **Paul the old man, who** 9 **now-a-days is a prisoner for Christ Jesus.** This beautiful appeal would be quite spoiled if we adopted the reading (strangely preferred by Lightfoot) of 'ambassador' (*presbeutês*) instead of **old man** (*presbutês*). The two words differ in Greek only by a single letter, and easily become confused; but the best MSS. seem to be agreed on **old man.** Moreover, Paul has just declared that he does not fall back on his authority as an ambassador: he is content to speak as a Christian friend, grown old in Christ's service, and now lying in prison. The objection has been raised that Paul at this time cannot have been very old. When he first comes on the scene, several years after the Crucifixion, he was a 'young man' (Acts 7 : 58), and was probably under sixty when he wrote this letter. But the fact that he was not 'aged,' on a mere reckoning of years, only makes his words more pathetic. He was broken down before his time, and quietly bids his friend remember this as he throws himself on his compassion.

So he comes at last to his request: **I appeal to you on behalf** 10 **of my spiritual son born while I was in prison. It is Onesimus!** It is worth noting the delicacy with which he declares his tender interest in Onesimus and thorough belief in his conversion, before introducing the name, which was sure to be obnoxious to the injured master. His confidence that the slave is now a new man is brought out by a play on words which cannot be reproduced in English. The name **Onesimus** means 'profitable,' and by a sudden turn in the grammar Paul says 'whom I begot as truly Profitable.' The reference to his converts as his sons or children is frequent in Paul and we can thus infer that Onesimus, though he belonged to a

Christian household and doubtless knew something about the gospel, had not previously been a Christian. His conversion was the work of Paul, who rejoiced in it all the more since he had been able to do this work for Christ in prison, where he seemed to be so useless. How Onesimus had been led to seek him out we do not know. But there is no more striking proof of the impression which Paul made on all who knew him, however slightly, than that this friendless slave had instinctively turned to him in his need.

It is no doubt with the meaning of the name 'Onesimus' still in his mind that Paul goes on to describe him as one
11 who was formerly **worthless** (no good), but who is now **worth something** (of much good) **to you and to me.** He wishes Philemon to know that he is making a sacrifice in parting with Onesimus. The once **worthless** servant had changed into a trusty and valuable one. Philemon would find him so, as Paul had already done. Not only so, but he had learned
12 to regard him with a deep affection. In **sending him back to you, I am parting with my very heart.** So, instead of asking for a favour, Paul impresses on Philemon that he is conferring
13 one. **I would have liked** (I was minded) **to keep him beside me, that as your deputy he might serve me during my imprisonment for the gospel.** We can gather from these words that Onesimus had constituted himself Paul's servant, attending to his comfort and going on his errands as he lay in prison. Paul had come to depend on his service, and felt that he would be helpless without him. With a beautiful touch he gives Philemon credit for all this faithful labour. Onesimus had been acting for his master, who would only have been too happy, if he had been near at hand, to comfort his old friend who was suffering for the gospel.

14 If Philemon only had opportunity, he would doubtless urge Paul to keep Onesimus with him: **but I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that your goodness to me might come of your own free will, without any appearance of constraint.** Paul might almost seem to hint that Onesimus should be sent back to him, but this is hardly probable if the letter was written from Rome, which lay at

such a distance from Colossae. All that he tries to do is to impress on Philemon, as strongly as he can, that Onesimus has done him the greatest service. He knows, too, that if he were to detain him longer Philemon would come to hear of it, and might justly feel that Paul was taking advantage of their friendship to deprive him of his slave. So he ingeniously makes out that Philemon hitherto has made him a free gift of the slave's services, but that it will not do to presume any longer on his good nature.

THE REQUEST THAT ONESIMUS SHOULD BE FORGIVEN (15–20)

Perhaps this was why you and he were parted for a while, 15
that you might get him back for good, no longer a mere 16
slave but something more than a slave—a beloved brother ;
especially dear to me, but how much more to you as a
man and as a Christian ! You count me a partner ? 17
Then receive him as you would receive me, and if he has 18
cheated you of any money or owes you any sum, put that
down to my account. This is in my own handwriting : 19
' I Paul promise to refund it '—not to mention that you
owe me, over and above, your very soul. Come, brother,
let me have some return from you in the Lord ! Refresh 20
my heart in Christ.

Onesimus had run away, apparently after robbing his 15 master. Paul draws a veil over all this, and says **you and he were parted for a while.** It is not merely that he wants bygones to be bygones. He suggests that through the slave's misconduct Providence was somehow working. It was God's purpose that both slave and master should obtain a great good through apparent evil. Not only was Onesimus to be restored a better man than he was before, but God had meant **that you might get him back for good.** The bond between the two men had formerly been a casual, mercenary one. Now there would be a permanent, spiritual tie, which would unite them not only for the rest of this life but through eternity. For Philemon would now have Onesimus **no longer as a mere slave but something more than a slave—a** 16

beloved brother ; especially dear to me, but how much more to you as a man and as a Christian (literally, both in the flesh and in the Lord). It is not suggested that Onesimus, because he has now become a Christian, should be given his freedom. We miss the point of the letter altogether if we conceive of Paul as dealing with a serious offence in a purely sentimental fashion. He insists that the deserter should return to the post of duty and henceforth shew himself faithful, and even face punishment if it should be dealt out to him. This was the only way in which he could prove that his conversion had been genuine. At the same time Philemon is besought to consider his slave as **more than a slave.** In this man who, like himself, had taken Christ as his Master, he must recognize **a brother**, entitled to his respect and love.

It is true that Paul never openly denounced slavery, the most crying evil of his time, but in this verse he strikes at the very root of slavery. The system was made possible only by the habit of mind which regarded the slave merely as a slave—a chattel to be disposed of without any recognition of his manhood. Paul insists that the Christian must treat a slave as **more than a slave**—perceiving that the accident of his status can make no difference to his inherent rights as an immortal soul. It was the application of this principle which finally made the institution of slavery an impossible one in any Christian society. He declares that for himself Onesimus has already become a **beloved brother**, and says that he must be even more so for his master. The bond between Philemon and Onesimus will henceforth be a double one. They will be related ' in the flesh ' (i.e. in matters of this world) as master and servant, and they will be also related as brothers in Christ. These two relationships will strengthen and enrich one another. It was one of the redeeming features of ancient slavery that a beautiful attachment sometimes grew up between master and servant. Paul anticipates that this will be so in the household of Philemon, where the daily intercourse will be sweetened and ennobled by the sense of common obedience to Christ. So he renews
17 his petition, confident now that it will be granted. If then

you count me as a partner (or, comrade) **then receive him as you would receive me.**

It is difficult to say whether Paul is here appealing to his friendship with Philemon or to his fellowship in the Christian life. Probably he wishes to suggest both ideas, and there may be a personal allusion, which we cannot now trace, in the word he uses. In ver. 1 he speaks of Philemon having been his **fellow-worker** on some well-remembered occasion. He now makes his request on the strength of this old partnership in the cause of the gospel. **If he has cheated you of any** 18 **money** (or wronged you in any way) **or owes you any sum, put that down to my account.** It can hardly be doubted that Paul here touches, in the most delicate way he can, on the chief offence of which Onesimus had been guilty. Not only had he run away, as every slave would naturally try to do, but he had robbed his master, and the sum must have been considerable if it had carried him all the way to Rome. Paul offers himself to make restitution. No doubt he could feel pretty certain that his old friend would never call on him for this debt, but he appears to make the offer quite seriously, and the fact that he does so is curious and puzzling. From various references in the epistles we know that he was often in deep poverty, and earned his living precariously by the work of his hands. Yet there are indications that in the later part of his career he had funds at his command. Felix detained him in the hope that he would purchase his liberty by a bribe. In Rome he lived in his own hired house. Here he offers to restore, out of his own money, all that Onesimus had stolen.

Sir William Ramsay (in *Paul, the Traveller and Roman Citizen*) makes the interesting suggestion that in his later years he may have inherited some wealth from his family, who were of good position, and who apparently never broke with him, since we hear of a nephew who came to his rescue at Jerusalem (Acts 23 : 16). It is hard to see how Paul could ever have been possessed of any means except in some such way. To this promise of restitution he solemnly attaches 19 his signature : ‘ I Paul write with my own hand that I will repay.' The letter was presumably dictated after Paul's usual custom, but at this point he takes up the pen himself and writes his bond, in the form required by law. This, we may be fairly sure, was meant playfully. He knew very well that Philemon would not doubt his word, and that he was not the sort of man who would want everything on a strict business footing. Yet the purpose of the little jest is to prove that he was quite serious. If payment was required before Onesimus could be taken back to favour he was willing to make it, and here was his bond.

After thus declaring himself in debt to Philemon, Paul gently reminds him that there was also a debt on the other side. 'I will not say anything of the fact that you, on your part, **owe me your very soul.'** He is not suggesting that the debt, for this reason, should be remitted. The idea is simply that Philemon may well agree to accept Paul's terms, since he is under an obligation to him that can never be repaid. It need not be inferred that Philemon had been directly converted by Paul, though it is possible that his first knowledge of the gospel had come to him from his hearing Paul on one of his visits to Ephesus. As a Colossian, however, he would naturally be a convert of Epaphras, and probably nothing more is meant than that through Epaphras, his disciple, the whole Colossian church owes its being to Paul. We have only to think of the pride and tenderness with which he has spoken a few verses before of his spiritual child Onesimus. If Philemon had stood to him in the same direct relation this would have been more clearly indicated in the letter, and would have determined its whole character.

20 As he reflects, then, on all that Philemon owes him, he feels justified in urging that his petition should be granted. **Come, brother, let me have some return** (profit) **from you in the Lord ! Refresh my heart in Christ.** Since I have done so much for you, I may surely expect you to grant me this little thing. After all, he is asking for nothing but the discharge of a Christian duty. He is not seeking anything for himself, but only desires, as one Christian from another, that something should be done for Christ. The pleasure he will feel, if his

request is answered, will be a pure, unselfish one. He will rejoice to know, as an apostle of Christ, that at least one man has understood Christ's message.

THE CLOSE OF THE LETTER (21–25)

I send you this letter relying on your obedience ; I know you 21
will do even more than I tell you. And get quarters 22
ready for me, for I am hoping that by your prayers I shall
be restored to you.

Epaphras my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus salutes you. 23
So do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow- 24
workers.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. 25

It was Paul's custom to close his letters with a few words or sentences in his own handwriting—partly to guarantee the authenticity of the letter, partly to add a final personal touch. In this manner he probably wrote the remaining verses. He has already finished what he had to say, but he enforces his request once more, and then throws in a few friendly words and greetings before ending with the usual benediction.

21 We are to conceive that he has read over what the scribe has written at his dictation, and then adds : **relying on your obedience** I write to you, knowing **you will do even more than I tell you.** He feels sure, as he well might do, that Philemon cannot resist such an appeal. Since he has expressly disclaimed (ver. 8) any wish to exercise his apostolic authority, it is not Philemon's obedience to himself on which he relies. Frequently in the New Testament all effort to act on the teaching of Christ is described as 'obedience,' and in this sense we must understand the word here. It has sometimes been inferred that when he expects Philemon to do even more than he has asked, Paul hints that he should take this opportunity to give Onesimus his freedom. But we spoil the effect of the words when we thus take them as veiling some definite request. Paul leaves his friend to decide for himself how he will act towards the returned slave. All that he has done is to indicate the line of conduct which Christian

principle requires, and he is sure that Philemon's obedience, his desire to conform to the full spirit of the gospel, will do all the rest. In his reception of Onesimus he will shew even greater kindness than has been asked of him in this letter.

22 Paul now has something to ask on his own account. 'Besides all this, prepare to have me as your guest, for I hope that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.' The words imply, if we take them thus literally, that Paul is looking forward to an early release from captivity, and intends to return to Asia Minor and stay for a time with Philemon at Colossae. His plan some years before, when he wrote his epistle to the Romans, was to give up his work in the East and devote himself henceforth to a western mission (cf. Rom. 15 : 23, 24). From Rome he was to proceed to Spain, and from there, perhaps, to Gaul and Britain. We can well believe that he now perceived this ambitious scheme to be out of the question. He had aged prematurely and was broken in health and spirits ; he was homesick for his own country and the society of his old friends.

In order to explain why his mind was turning to the east it is not necessary to assume that these letters of the captivity were written at Ephesus, only a short journey from Colossae. The change of plan can amply be accounted for by all that happened since the plan was formed. In any case, it is doubtful whether the words here are to be taken literally. Nothing is said in the letter to Colossians about a projected visit. Paul was not such an exacting guest that Philemon needed to be warned of his coming a long time before, so that he might spend all the interval in making preparations for his entertainment. Perhaps the reference may be best understood as a playful one. Paul is not planning to go to Colossae, but he thinks it possible that before long he may recover his liberty. He knows that the Colossian Christians, like all others, have been praying on his behalf, and in gratitude to them he expresses himself cheerfully, whatever may have been his secret misgivings. 'Thanks to your prayers I shall be free again presently ; before you know I may be needing your guest-chamber.' When we look into his words carefully, he is by no means confident. He feels that if he regains his freedom it will only be by the special grace of God. This is the force of the peculiar word he uses: **I shall be restored to you.**

In a single sentence he sends the greetings of the friends 23
who are with him. They are the same as those whom he 24
mentions at the end of Colossians—Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke. Jesus surnamed Justus is omitted, probably because he was unknown to Philemon personally, though he had friends in the Colossian church. Epaphras is described as **my fellow-prisoner,** while in Colossians this title was given to Aristarchus. The difference is best explained on the assumption that Paul's friends took turns in bearing him company and so subjecting themselves to captivity along with him. When he wrote Colossians it was Aristarchus who was with him; now it was Epaphras. The other friends are mentioned as **fellow-workers.** Although he was in prison, Paul did not think of himself as laid aside. He interested himself in the community at Rome, and did what he could, in his restricted sphere, to help on the mission. The others, who were at liberty to do more active service, were his **fellow-workers.**

The short epistle closes with the same form of benediction 25
as we find in Gal. 6:18. Throughout the letter Paul has addressed Philemon personally, but now uses the plural, remembering that Apphia and Archippus had also been included in his salutation. Both in Galatians and here, although he addresses a number of people, he speaks in the singular of their 'spirit.' He thinks of those whom he blesses as united in a spiritual bond. Christ is to bestow his grace on this fellowship they have with one another and with himself.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE EPHESIANS

INTRODUCTION

(1) Authorship

It is only in recent times that doubts have been raised as to the Pauline authorship of the epistle to Ephesians. It must have been written either in Paul's lifetime or very shortly afterwards, for a number of echoes of its thought and language are to be found in the First Epistle of Peter, which was written before the close of the first century. It is frequently quoted by the second-century Fathers, and they never question that it is the genuine work of Paul. Among modern writers there are not a few who regard it not only as an authentic letter of Paul but as his masterpiece—the very crown of all his epistles. This, perhaps, is to rank it too high, but it certainly stands out as one of the noblest of New Testament writings, and this, when all is said, is the strongest argument for its genuineness. It is difficult to believe that an imitator could have produced a work so like the writings of Paul and yet so splendid and original.

Several imitations of Paul have come down to us, and are obviously feeble and second-rate. The so-called Pastoral epistles are on a very different level, and seem to be based on authentic Pauline material; but even these betray their derivative character. As soon as we turn to them from Galatians and 1 Corinthians we feel ourselves in a different atmosphere. The author makes a poor attempt at copying Paul's language, while he entirely misses the deeper qualities of Paul's thought. From the earliest times the Church was doubtful of these epistles, but Ephesians has always held its own with the other writings which bear the name of Paul. Some of the most radical critics in our own day accept it as genuine, and those who take the opposite view are unable to do so without some misgiving.

The principal arguments against its genuineness may be briefly summarized :

(1) The style in which it is written is different from Paul's—involved and monotonous, instead of concise and forcible, and full of variety. The whole epistle is made up of a few interminable sentences, in which the clauses are all tangled with each other.

(2) It is based on Colossians, and continually repeats its very language. This is the argument on which the negative criticism chiefly relies. Would Paul, whose mind was so fertile in ideas, be thus content to copy from himself ? The natural answer is that he wrote the two epistles together, and while the thoughts of Colossians were still in his mind he could not help reproducing them. But the difficulty is that he does not reproduce them. To each of them he gives a different point and brings it into relation to a different set of ideas. If Paul wrote the letter himself would he not use the language of Colossians in the sense he had given it already ? We seem to be dealing with another writer who has taken Colossians as his model and adapted it to his own thinking.

(3) While it cannot be denied that the teaching of Ephesians is rooted in Paulinism, the Pauline ideas are presented in a more advanced form than in the other epistles. Elsewhere, for instance, Paul describes the Church as the Body of Christ, but he uses this term by way of metaphor, while in Ephesians it is taken literally, and connected with a mystical doctrine. A value is attached to 'knowledge' which is not in keeping with Paul's earlier thought. All through the epistle there is a strain of Hellenistic speculation which finds closer parallels in the Fourth Gospel than in the writings of Paul.

(4) The personal references in the epistle seem rather to come from a disciple of Paul, looking back on him after his death, than from Paul himself. Would Paul, for instance, have described the group to which he belonged as 'the holy Apostles' (3 : 5) ? Would he have called on his readers to admire his unique insight into the mystery of the gospel (3 : 4) ? Would he have overdone his humility by alluding to himself as **less than the least of all saints** (3 : 8) ?

Against all these arguments, however, we must set not only the supreme excellence of the epistle but the inimitably Pauline stamp on all its thinking. It may be confidently said that there is nothing in Ephesians which Paul might not have written. Some ideas are more highly developed in this than in the other epistles, but they are always Paul's ideas, and it is difficult to see how anyone but himself could have so drawn out their deeper implications. In like manner it may be asserted that while the style is peculiar, it has no characteristic which is not at least suggested in Paul's other writings. The sentences are involved, but there are chapters in Romans which are not entirely lucid and simple. It may be remarked, too, that the peculiarities of style are intentional, and, one may add, necessary. The epistle, as we shall see later, takes the form of a prayer, and has the elevation of language which is natural in prayer.

When we turn to the relation between Ephesians and Colossians a more difficult problem presents itself, but it is hard to understand the argument that if Paul himself was the borrower he would not have given a different turn to so many of his previous phrases and ideas. Is not this precisely what we should expect ? When a writer borrows from himself he does what he likes with his own material. He cannot help revising and modifying in every sentence. It is only the unwarranted imitator who feels that he must stick closely to his copy lest he may betray himself. So we may take the differences from Colossians as evidence that Ephesians is by the same hand, and this conclusion may be drawn, still more certainly, from the agreements. If the Ephesian epistle stood quite alone it might be convincingly argued that these peculiar ideas are foreign to Paul's mind as we know it elsewhere. But in Colossians we find him anticipating just these ideas. There is no reason why the man who wrote the one epistle should not also have written the other.

(2) DESTINATION

To whom was the epistle addressed ? Many answers have been given to this question, but nothing is certain except that the letter was not written to the Ephesians. In all good manuscripts the words *in Ephesus* which now stand in the opening verse are wanting, and it is expressly indicated in the body of the epistle that the writer and his readers are unknown to one another. Paul cannot therefore be writing to the Ephesian church, where he had laboured for three years not long before.

According to one theory which has been widely accepted the letter was a circular one, and was entrusted to Tychicus in perhaps half a dozen copies, each of them with a blank space in which he was to insert the address before delivering it. In at least one case he presumably forgot this part of his duty, and it is this copy which has come down to us. Another theory is that our epistle is the letter to Laodicea to which Paul refers in Col. 4 : 16. We know that in Marcion's New Testament, compiled about A.D. 140, it bore the title 'to the Laodiceans.' Most likely this was only a guess of Marcion's, but it has found favour with some modern scholars. Harnack in particular has accepted it, and offers an ingenious explanation of why the title was dropped out. Laodicea, he argues, was something of a black sheep after the scathing description of it in the book of Revelation, and no one cared to associate it with Paul's noble epistle, the address of which was now either omitted or changed to 'Ephesus.'

This theory is far from convincing, but the view that our Ephesians is the Laodicean letter has perhaps as much to say for itself as any other. We know for certain that Paul did write a letter to Laodicea, and if it was additional to the other three he must have used his time well while Tychicus was getting ready to sail. We can better understand his desire that the Colossians and Laodiceans should read each other's letters if the Laodicean letter was our Ephesians. He would feel, as we feel now, that the two epistles threw light on one another and needed to be studied together. But in the absence of a definite title all conjecture as to the address of the epistle is futile. Paul was interested in many churches which would lie in Tychicus' path during his journey. For any one of them, or for several of them together, he may have intended his letter.

(3) AIM AND CHARACTER OF THE EPISTLE

The epistle to Colossians was written with a definite controversial purpose. A church in which Paul was deeply interested had been invaded by false teachers, and he was called on to examine the strange doctrines and shew where they were wrong and dangerous. The companion epistle to Ephesians has a more positive aim. Paul wrote it, if one might say so, for his own satisfaction. In his discussion of the false teachings he had arrived at certain new ideas which were obviously of far-reaching import, and he set himself in the later epistle to explain them, apart from their controversial bearings, and to point out their value for the Christian life. Paul, however, was not an abstract theologian but a missionary, and always wrote with some practical end in view. Ephesians, more than anything else he wrote, is a private meditation, but he composed it as an epistle, for the benefit of a particular group of readers. What was the missionary purpose which he intended it to serve ?

The question is hard to answer, since we know nothing of the church he wrote to, not even its name. In any case, his purpose must have been a quite general one, for he had never visited this community, and cannot have known much of its special difficulties. We are probably to think of him as combating a danger which in his later days threatened the whole Church, and for some reason had become acute in one locality. The danger was that of disunion. Jews and Gentiles within the Church were still at variance. Heresies had sprung up, and each community tended to break into sects and parties. The idea of liberty which Paul had championed had led, as it always does at the beginning, to mischievous results. There were men and women everywhere who had thrown off the natural obligations in the name of Christian freedom, so that each household as well as each community was divided against itself. Paul deals therefore with the unity of the Church—what it means, how it must be realized, how it is bound up with the very idea of the gospel.

The epistle falls into two clearly marked sections. In the first three chapters Paul dwells on the Christian message and the divine purpose which lies at the heart of it. In chaps. 4–6 he is concerned with the duties required of Christians as members of the body of Christ. It is his custom in all the epistles to follow up the main discussion with a series of practical admonitions, but in Ephesians the doctrinal and hortatory sections are closely connected, and present the same theme on its two different sides. First it is shown that God's great purpose is to 'unite' all things, and that this is the meaning of the Church. Then the Christian duties are examined in the light of this object for which the Church exists. If the Church is to unify the world it must be united within itself. Its leaders must work together harmoniously. Its members must be filled with the same spirit and help and serve one another in all the relations of life. The epistle seems at first sight to lead up to an anti-climax. It begins with an attempt to fathom the mind of God when He called the world into being. It closes with homely counsels to husbands and wives, masters and servants. Just as the modern man of science turns from the structure of the stars to that of the atoms, confident that both will exhibit the same laws, so Paul believes that the one divine purpose is everywhere valid. In order to understand the common duties we must learn to relate them to the whole divine plan.

Throughout the first section, as we have already seen, the epistle takes the form of a prayer. Ancient letters began with some pious formula, thanking the gods for the reader's well-being, and Paul regularly follows this practice, except that he changes the conventional phrases into the language of heartfelt Christian prayer. In Ephesians, however, the introductory prayer is extended over the main part of the letter. The theological ideas are woven into the prayer. It is this that explains not only the sustained elevation of the style but also the weight and impressiveness of the thought. If Paul had written argumentatively we might have felt as we sometimes do in Romans, that he was running off into arbitrary speculation. But he does not argue. He only utters the thoughts that rise in his heart as he holds communion with God. Elsewhere he tells us of a man who was caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable words, and in this epistle he seems to be imparting the knowledge that came to him in those moments of ecstatic vision. Just as Handel composed the ' Hallelujah Chorus ' on his knees, so Paul wrote this sublime epistle, in which he tries to penetrate the ' mystery '—the ultimate design of God.

(4) THE REUNION IN CHRIST

What, then, is this ' mystery ' which Paul feels himself commissioned to reveal ? He states it in a passage (1 : 9, 10) which is meant to supply the key to the whole epistle : ' God has made known to us the mystery of his will—that in accordance with his eternal plan he should reunite all things in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth.' Christ, that is to say, is to be the centre in which all conflicting forces are at last to find their unity. In the light of this divine purpose, hidden from all ages and now revealed, Paul considers the significance of the Church. He takes his departure from the visible fact that Jews and Gentiles, formerly hostile, have been reconciled in the Church. Out of a divided humanity God has made a new, united humanity through Christ. This is to be the beginning of a world-wide process of reconciliation. The Church is like the first of the rings made by a stone thrown into water. An impulse has begun with the Church which will never cease until it has spread through the whole universe. So the epistle turns on these two ideas—that Christ is the principle of union, and that the Church is his instrument whereby he will finally reconcile all things in heaven and earth.

At this point it is necessary to remind ourselves of certain presuppositions which lie behind Paul's thought. He tells us himself in 1 Cor. 2 : 6–8 that he had a ' hidden wisdom,' an esoteric doctrine, which he only imparted to his mature converts. It consisted, apparently, in the effort to connect the gospel with its antecedents in the unseen world. The work which Christ had accomplished on earth was like the final scene in a vast drama which had hitherto been enacted on a higher stage, and to understand it fully we need to relate it to this mysterious background. Why was it, for example, that Christ was put to death? It is very remarkable that Paul hardly ever makes a reference to the human agents, the Jewish and Roman authorities who had brought about the Crucifixion. They were not, in his view, responsible. They were the unconscious tools of the 'princes of this world,' the rebellious spirits which had been seeking, ever since the creation, to frustrate the designs of God. These powers of darkness had been aware that Christ's coming to earth was meant for their downfall, and had conspired to destroy him, not perceiving that his death was to be the necessary means by which God would fulfil His purpose. Behind all Paul's thinking there is this sense of a tremendous warfare which had been in process for untold ages in the world of spirits. In the other epistles we have only passing glimpses into that dark hinterland of the gospel history, but in Ephesians it is kept constantly before our eyes. Ever and again we come on the phrase, 'In heavenly places,' that is, 'in the invisible world' (**the heavenly sphere**). We are meant to realize that it is there, and in the things which had happened there, that we must seek the true explanation of the gospel.

Paul speaks, then, of the 'mystery,' the hidden purpose which has determined the action of God since the beginning. It has been this—'to reunite all things in Christ.' The universe, owing to some primal disaster, has become divided against itself. Gnostic thinkers at a later time were to form profound theories as to the cause of the great catastrophe, but Paul simply accepts the fact. God's world has become subject to endless discord; a conflict has originated in heavenly places and has given rise to all the antagonisms that we find in nature, in human society, in our own inner being. God has purposed to heal the division, reconciling all things to each other and to Himself. His plan has ever been to effect this reunion through Christ. To this end He has been working secretly from the beginning, and when we once apprehend the ‘ mystery,’ the inner purpose of God, we have the clue to all His action. We can trace a clear design shaping itself out through the seeming confusion of past ages. We can look forward into the ages to come and catch a glimpse of the ‘ far off divine event to which the whole creation moves.’ This line of the poet might have been written with the governing idea of Ephesians in mind. The whole course of the world, as Paul sees it, is determined by the ultimate goal—the reunion of all things in Christ.

(5) THE CHURCH

So we pass to the second of the two great themes around which the epistle revolves. Christ is the principle of reunion, but how does he accomplish his work? It was effected, first of all, in his own Person. He became flesh, and by his death destroyed those forces, inherent in the flesh, which made for discord. Paul thinks of them as summed up in the Law, which acted like a barrier, separating men from each other and from God. On his Cross Christ broke down this ‘ wall of partition ’ and entered on a new life in which all the old differences were transcended. This life of the risen Christ imparts itself through the Church. Just as Christ assumed a body for the purposes of his earthly life, so he has now undergone a larger incarnation. The Church is his body, energized and controlled by the life of Christ, its head. And in the Church, as in the risen Christ himself, the old oppositions have ceased to exist. A new type of man has come into being who is a union of Jew and Greek and of all the different classes and interests.

Paul makes much, in this connexion, of the spiritual gifts which Christ has bestowed on the Church. They are manifold in their nature, and yet by their very diversity they bring about a close unity. Just as the body is one because it has a great variety of members all working together, so the Church becomes more truly united the more it includes men and women of the most diverse gifts. Thus in the Church we can see the mysterious plan of God in process of fulfilling itself.

Hostile races, natures that apparently have nothing in common—all the discordant elements in human life are here brought together and subjected to the power of Christ. In virtue of their very differences they are able to fit together into an harmonious whole.

This union in the Church, however, is only the beginning. With the Church as his instrument Christ is to carry out that infinite purpose of reconciliation which has always been in the mind of God. Through the Church he makes himself the great centre on which all things converge, so that the whole universe is finally brought into harmony. In this manner we are to understand those sublime but difficult words which gather up the thought of the first chapter: 'The Church which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.' The meaning may best be explained by an illustration. You can think of a man's personality as spreading out through the whole sphere in which his action makes itself felt. A great leader, for instance, may be said to *fill* the nation that depends on him. Its armies and assemblies, its multitudinous commerce, the lives of all its people are controlled by his will. The nation in its whole extent is pervaded by him; it is like the complete expression of the one man. Yet he is identified, in the last resort, with a *body*, perhaps a frail, insignificant one. The energy which goes out from him and gives movement to everything resides in that body. So the Church may outwardly be of small account. When this epistle was written it consisted of a few thousands of people altogether, meeting in small groups in the back streets of Antioch, Ephesus, Rome. Yet Paul sees in it an incalculable force. It was Christ's Body, the organism in which his spirit was immediately present. From this as a centre he exerted a power to which there could be no limit. 'God has given him as head of the universe to the Church which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.'

(6) THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE

Thus in Ephesians an attempt is made to connect the work of Christ with the ultimate meaning of the world. The conception is one of magnificent boldness. It may be affirmed that no Christian thinker since has risen to such heights of speculation as Paul attains to in the first three chapters of Ephesians. No wonder that he himself bids his readers look back on what he has written, ‘ whereby, as you read, you will perceive my knowledge in the mystery of Christ ’ (3 : 4). The epistle, indeed, has often been criticized on account of the very grandeur of its thought. It is argued that the speculative interest has displaced the purely religious one. In earlier epistles the whole emphasis is on faith, while here it is thrown on knowledge. The possession of this higher knowledge is made the grand object of the Christian life. A number of strange terms which recur in the epistle—Plerôma, Aeons, World-rulers, Light and Darkness—appear in the following age as the watchwords of Gnosticism. So it is contended that Ephesians cannot be the work of Paul, and can hardly be reckoned as a New Testament writing. It is rather the earliest example of Gnostic speculation.

Now it is true that in some respects the epistle foreshadows the later speculations, but there is one essential difference. In the Gnostic systems the mere act of *knowing* is everything. True life consists in nothing else than that higher illumination which is bestowed on specially gifted minds. Our epistle insists on knowledge not for its own sake but as the means towards a living fellowship with Christ. It declares that this fellowship is the only perfect knowledge. The epistle culminates in the great prayer : ‘ That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height.’ But this prayer for illumination at once proceeds : ‘ And that ye may know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.’ In other words, the highest object of knowledge is the love of Christ, and that love can only be known by responding to it. This is the thought which in one form or another pervades the epistle.

(7) PRACTICAL ISSUES

Paul’s aim, therefore, while he works with ideas that seem purely speculative, is to establish on a deeper basis several great practical truths. He touches on them repeatedly in the course of the epistle, and in the closing chapters dwells on them exclusively.

(1) He wishes to assure his readers of the certainty and completeness of their salvation, and this he can only do by shewing that the work of Christ is grounded in the innermost purpose of God. There are many in our own day who would have us think of Christ as one in a succession of great teachers. There were those in Paul's day who made him one, and perhaps the highest, of the angelic beings through whom God effects His will. Paul declares that the gospel means nothing unless Christ is placed at the centre. He is the one redemptive force, and there is no other. This is the motive behind the doctrine of the cosmic significance of Christ. It seems at first sight to be an abstract speculation, but Paul intends it to serve a great practical interest—that of affirming the absolute value of Christian faith.

(2) Again, in his effort to penetrate the 'mystery,' Paul is seeking to throw light on the nature and function of the Church. From his great thesis that God has purposed to reunite all things in Christ, he deduces the principle by which the Church must be guided in all its activities. The epistle to the Ephesians, we are sometimes told, is nothing but a product of old-world mysticism, with little or no bearing on the realities of the Christian life. But it is well to remind ourselves that this epistle has had more influence than almost any other writing on the actual course of history. Out of it grew the conception of the Church which dominated all thought and action for more than a thousand years. Paul certainly could not foresee how his doctrines were to embody themselves in the later Catholic church, and if he could have done so he would probably have left the epistle unwritten. Yet a work which was to have such vast consequences for the life of mankind was surely something more than a dreamy speculation.

(3) Once more, the epistle aims at supplying a motive which should govern Christian men in all their relations to the world and to one another. They are the servants of Christ, and their

duty is to co-operate with him in the great task to which he was appointed. What was this task? By his mystical inquiry into the divine plan Paul is able to define it as a work of reconciliation. It was God's eternal purpose to reunite all things in Christ, and Christians, as his people, are to bring unity to a divided world. All their action must be directed towards love, peace, mutual understanding. Each of them in his own small sphere—his church-community, his home, his circle of friends and neighbours—must be a centre of reconciliation, as Christ himself is to the whole world. In order to carry out this task the followers of Christ are to hold fast to him, like members of the body which draw vitality from the head.

(8) Permanent Value

In some respects the epistle to Ephesians is the most modern of all the New Testament writings. The author expresses himself in language that is now strange to us, but we can feel, when we look beneath the surface, that he is occupied with our own questions. He has answers to give to them which are still of the highest value.

The truth is that he was confronted with a situation which was curiously similar to that of our own day. Just as in our time we cannot shut our eyes to the new issues raised by science, so as a result of the Gentile mission Paul was compelled to face the problems of Greek speculation. What was the place of man in the cosmical order? How was the life of spirit to maintain itself over against the vast material forces? To many in that age, as in our own, it seemed that man's action was all prescribed for him by agencies over which he had no control—by the motions of the stars, by an iron law of Necessity. The preaching of the gospel was meaningless until these larger questions as to man's nature had been answered. In that age, too, the idea of human solidarity had become hardly less real than in our own day. Stoicism had given it a philosophical basis in the doctrine that all men are one in so far as they all share in the one principle of Reason. The Roman empire had imposed a visible unity by bringing all races under a common government and culture. Thoughtful men were demanding, as they are now, that religion should prove itself equal to a new task. Instead of dividing men as heretofore, might it not be made the instrument of reconciliation ?

It may be objected that while he faces a situation not unlike our own Paul works with mythological ideas which have now lost their meaning. Where we think of the laws of nature he conceives of angelic beings, principalities, and powers, who hold men in bondage. Too much is often made of this difficulty that the Bible writers lived in a world to which our scientific outlook was entirely foreign. From a religious point of view the new explanations have made no difference to the essential facts. We may speak of evolution, heredity, laws of physics, and chemistry, where Paul spoke of personal agencies, but our problem is still to find a place for human freedom over against tremendous forces which beset us on every side. Under all modes of thought man has been conscious of a higher life to which the material world is hostile or indifferent. In presence of those cosmic powers, call them what we will, we know ourselves to be helpless, and yet we appeal to some power which lies beyond them and by which we may find deliverance. Paul believes that we can obtain this liberty through Christ.

Before considering this place which he assigns to Christ it is necessary to lay emphasis on one aspect of his thought. He admits the antagonism between the material and the spiritual, but refuses to accept it as final. In the Gnostic systems the material was simply identified with evil, and this view passed into Christian thinking and gave rise to the asceticism of the Middle Ages and that morbid attitude to the natural world which the Church has never quite abandoned. This is not Paul's attitude. He feels that the antagonism of which we are conscious cannot be permanent. The world in its whole extent is God's world. He created it in order that material and spiritual should alike serve His purpose, and the conflict between them is due to some unnatural division. The world was meant to be in harmony with itself, but a principle of discord has entered into it. How is the harmony to be restored ?

Thus Paul advances to his central idea of the ‘ mystery,’ the hidden purpose which has been ever in the mind of God. He expresses himself in terms of mythology, and thinks of a host of rebellious angels who have taken possession of the material world and act wholly on their own impulse, ignorant of a divine plan. Yet in spite of themselves they are bringing God's purpose to fruition. We now express all this by saying that the world is a vast mechanism, whose wheels keep revolving for ever, under some control that seems utterly blind. So far as our science can discover there is no object in all that infinite movement which has been in process for countless ages. Paul is convinced that there *is* an object. The mechanism, he insists, is working unconsciously towards the fulfilment of a divine plan, and he believes that this plan has now been revealed to us through the gospel. ‘ To reunite all things in Christ.’

These words have been interpreted in many different ways, but the broad meaning is sufficiently clear. Paul thinks of Christ as the central principle of existence. When he has gathered back to himself all the multitudinous strands which are now in confusion he will bring the world into harmony. Here also we may take the essential idea of Paul out of its ancient mythological setting and express it in the language of modern thought. Christ, he would say, represents the ultimate values ; he stands, somehow, for the inner meaning of the world. All this visible creation exists not for its own sake but in order to unfold that divine purpose which was manifested in Christ. When Goethe was asked in his old age what he regarded as his chief gain from that long lifetime of intellectual striving, he answered : ‘ I have now arrived at the sure conviction that the world exists for spiritual ends.’ This was also the conviction of Paul ; only he thought of that higher purpose as summed up in Christ. Knowing him we enter into the hidden plan of God. We get behind the mechanism of the universe and apprehend its goal and meaning.

May we not say that it is some such faith as this towards which the thought of our time is struggling ? No one now is satisfied with the empty materialism which was so widely accepted a generation ago. The more we learn of natural law the more it seems to merge in some higher order. It becomes ever more difficult to believe that at the heart of this marvellous scheme of things there is no purpose. And if there is a purpose, must it not be connected somehow with that which we know to be highest in our own life ? According as we attain to love, goodness, knowledge of God, we fulfi our being. All our other activities are meant in some way to help us towards the achievement of those ends. Must it not be the same in the great life of the universe ? In this epistle, therefore, we have something more than a vagary of ancient speculation. The main conception that all things are to find their centre in Christ has still a meaning for us. Perhaps it is more intelligible now than when Paul wrote.

At least the suggestion of a great idea may likewise be traced in the other conception that the Church, as the body of Christ, is the instrument by which God fulfils His plan of bringing all things into harmony. It might seem at first sight as if here we had nothing but a fantastic dream. The Church may be a reconciling influence in human society, but how can we ascribe to it a cosmical value ? How can the life of the universe be affected by anything that happens in the Church ? Yet even here the epistle has points of contact with the thought of our own time. There are grounds for believing that a conscious rational life has first evolved itself on this earth. A new departure in creation, a wonderful experiment is in process here, and who can foresee where it is destined to end ? Is it not possible that influences are taking shape on earth which are destined in some way to affect the universe ? If this is so, there is surely some profound significance in the Church, the institution which stands for man's higher life, and seeks to manifest and unfold it. It is not presumptuous to believe that issues are bound up with the Church which are far vaster than we know. Through this body, in which Christ finds his larger incarnation, God is working out His purpose with the world.

In this epistle, therefore, Paul seeks to correlate his Christian faith with his outlook on the universe. His modes of thinking are different from ours, but he is grappling with our problems, and his ideas are of permanent value. We cannot but recognize, too, that by means of his speculations he enforces great practical truths which must always be vital to Christianity. He declares, for one thing, that if the gospel is to mean anything we must believe in its absolute worth. It is no mere milestone in man's spiritual progress, but reveals the inmost counsel of God. The whole system of things, if we could only see deeply enough, would be found to fit in with the Christian message. Again, the work of Christ is defined as in its essence a work of reconciliation. In him God has planned to reunite all things, bringing harmony into man's own nature, welding all men into a single brotherhood, gathering to one centre all forces which are now in conflict. And, finally, Paul impresses on us in this epistle the significance which Christ has given to man's common life. The most ordinary duties are linked up with issues far greater than we can measure. According as we fulfil the law of Christ in the home, the Church, the society around us, we are co-operating with God in His eternal purpose for the world.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE EPHESIANS

SALUTATION (1 : 1, 2)

i.

1 **Paul, by the will of God an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the**
2 **saints who are faithful[1] in Jesus Christ: grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

As in his other epistles, Paul begins with the conventional formula, ‘A to B sends greeting,’ but modifies and expands it so as to fill it with a Christian meaning. He who writes is an apostle, divinely called. His readers are the chosen servants of Christ. In place of the usual greeting he wishes them **grace and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

1 2 In this opening salutation we are faced at once with the two great critical problems of the epistle. The author announces himself as the apostle Paul, but on a number of grounds this authorship has been called in question. It is contended that while the letter is Pauline in so far as it reflects Paul's ideas and is modelled on one of his genuine epistles, the actual writer must have been one of his disciples. This problem has been discussed in the Introduction, and it need only be said here that in spite of some peculiarities which will always throw a shadow of doubt over the epistle, there is no good reason for denying its authenticity. It contains nothing which might not have been written by Paul, while it is everywhere marked by a grandeur and originality of thought which seem utterly beyond the reach of any mere imitator. The other problem concerns the destination of the epistle. In the best manuscripts the words ‘in Ephesus’ do not appear, and were apparently unknown to the earliest commentators. Marcion, about A.D. 140, seems to have read ‘in Laodicea,’

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[1] Omitting [ἐν Ἐφέσῳ].

but this may have been an insertion of his own, based on Col. 4 : 16. Origen tried to make sense of the text as he had it, 'to the saints that are.' He explained this as meaning 'to the genuine saints'—those who are Christians in fact as well as name. Some modern interpreters follow a like method: Moffatt, e.g., translating the Greek text exactly as it stands, has rendered **to the saints who are faithful.**

But it is hard to believe that any letter was ever written with such a vague address, and from Paul's procedure elsewhere (e.g. Rom. 1 : 8, Phil. 1 : 1) we know that his very purpose in the opening formula was to specify the church for which the letter was primarily intended. We may therefore take for granted that the crucial words are left out from the present text. The theory of a circular letter, with a blank for the particular address, has been discussed in the Introduction, but it is safer to assume that the epistle was furnished with a definite name which at an early date was obliterated. An accident of this kind might easily happen, especially when we remember that the opening verses would be written on the verge of the papyrus roll, which would be most exposed to wear and tear. It is doubtless with a special purpose that the name **Jesus Christ** is introduced into each of the three clauses of the greeting. The epistle takes the form of a meditation on the supreme significance of Christ. It is not concerned with any controversial issues, but with the central verities of the Christian faith. This is marked out at the outset by the solemn reiteration of the name of Christ.

THANKSGIVING (1 : 3–14)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who in 3
Christ has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the
heavenly sphere ! He chose us in him ere the world was 4
founded, to be consecrated and unblemished in his sight,
destining us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ. 5
Such was the purpose of his will, redounding to the praise of 6
his glorious grace bestowed on us in the Beloved, in whom 7

we enjoy our redemption, the forgiveness of our trespasses,
8 **by the blood he shed. So richly has God lavished his grace**
9 **upon us! He has granted us complete insight and under-**
standing of the open secret of his will, showing us how it
10 **was the purpose of his design so to order it in the fulness of**
the ages that all things in heaven and earth alike should be
11 **gathered up in Christ—in the Christ in whom we have**
had our heritage allotted us (as was decreed in the design
of him who carries out everything according to the counsel
12 **of his will), to make us redound to the praise of his glory**
13 **by being the first to put our hope in Christ. You also**
have heard the message of the truth, the gospel of your
salvation, and in him you also by your faith have been
stamped with the seal of the long-promised holy Spirit
14 **which is the pledge and instalment of our common heritage,**
that we may obtain our divine possession and so redound
to the praise of his glory.

As Paul begins his letters with the conventional formula of greeting so he usually follows the epistolary practice of his day by adding a sentence or two in which he thanks God for the welfare of those whom he addresses. These expressions of thankfulness are never perfunctory, as in the ordinary letters of the time; they are suffused with Christian feeling, and are carefully framed in view of the actual situation of the readers. In Ephesians, however, the thanksgiving is peculiarly full, and expands into a hymn of praise to God for all that He has done for His people through Christ. In the Greek it is made up of a single long sentence, in which the clauses are so involved with one another that they can hardly be separated. The whole passage is built up around the phrase **in Christ**, which, with its variants, **in him** and **in whom**, occurs a dozen times. By this phrase, as in the repetition of the name of Christ in the opening formula, Paul seeks to define the theme on which the epistle is to turn. Everything is concentrated in Christ. He is the ultimate principle in whom all conflicting elements are to be reconciled.

3 Instead of a simple 'I thank God,' Paul begins with a

solemn liturgical phrase: **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,** and the word **blessed** is thrice repeated in different forms to mark the boundless extent of the debt of gratitude which is due to God. The conventional thanksgiving at the beginning of a letter invariably dwelt on the good health and prosperity which had been vouchsafed to the person addressed. Paul here thanks God **who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.** He recognizes that the true gifts of God are those which are imparted through the spirit, and which further our eternal well-being. This thought is brought out more emphatically by the addition of the phrase **in the heavenly sphere** (literally, places). This singular phrase is found only in the present epistle, where it occurs five times. The Greek might be rendered 'among the heavenly beings,' and some commentators would take it in this sense. But there can be little doubt, when we compare the various contexts in which it is found, that it must be understood locally. Perhaps the best equivalent in English would be 'in the invisible world.' In these epistles of Colossians and Ephesians Paul thinks of the redemption through Christ as the fulfilment of a purpose which has been present in the mind of God from all eternity. All that was done on earth was prepared for in a higher or **heavenly sphere.** The great act achieved by Christ has a meaning not only for human history but for the whole life of the universe. The infinite significance of the Christian revelation, so fundamental to the thought of this epistle, is expressed in this characteristic phrase. The suggestion in the present verse is that God's goodness to us, as finally manifested in Christ, began before the world existed. His gift of Christ was no after-thought, but had been contemplated from the very beginning in His eternal purpose.

This thought comes to definite expression in the next 4 verse, **He chose us in him ere the world was founded.** There is a suggestion here of the Logos doctrine which we have already met with in Col. 1 : 15 f. God is conceived, after the manner of Philo, as the divine Architect, who framed the whole plan of creation in His mind before he began the work. In Philo the Logos is related to God in much the same way as the intellect in man to His will and personality ; but Paul's conception is more than a metaphysical one. He thinks of Christ not as the abstract Logos but as the ' beloved Son,' who shares in the counsels of God and through whom they are carried into effect. In him, as in His other self, God formed His purposes before the world was created. Not only so, but He chose out in Christ those who would finally participate in His salvation. We have here a reference to that doctrine of election which holds such a prominent place in Paul's thinking, and which has often been so grievously misunderstood. As interpreted by Augustine and Calvin it implies that no man can be certain that he is numbered with Christ's people. God shews mercy only to His elect, and He chose them before the world began according to an inscrutable plan which to our minds may appear purely arbitrary. All that men can do is to put their faith in Christ, hoping that they may be among the chosen, and yet aware that in spite of all their faith and endeavour they may in the end be rejected.

This gloomy doctrine, which in times past has brought misery to many pious souls, is just the opposite of what Paul intended. He took for granted that all who had given themselves to Christ were chosen, and for that reason and no other they had been led to the great decision. His very name for Christians is ' those set apart,' or, as he sometimes puts it, ' the called of God.' The underlying motive of his predestination theory is to make the Christian's hope of salvation absolutely certain. Those who have been drawn to Christ are to feel assured that their faith is no matter of accident, God has led them to it in order that He might fulfil His purpose to make them His children. Not only so, but they are to feel that their constancy will not depend on their own poor human effort. God Himself has chosen them from all eternity, and His power is with them, and He will bear them through. It was this belief that he was called by God which supported Paul himself in his work for Christ, and he seeks to impart it to his fellow-Christians. Here, at the very outset of his hymn of thanksgiving, he dwells on the inspiring truth that God has chosen us.

The thought of God's choice gives meaning to the next words, ' that we should be holy (consecrated) and unblemished in his sight.' As a rule the word ' holy ' in the New Testament is not to be taken ethically, but only signifies that the Christians have been **consecrated**—set apart as God's people. This is implied here, but the ethical meaning is also suggested. Those who are ' holy ' are also to be morally blameless. Their calling by God lays on them the obligation to lead a life which God Himself will be able to approve. The phrase *in the sight of God* is an Old Testament one, and means that the thing spoken of is excellent even when judged by God's own standards. It is possible to take the words **in love** as part of the next clause, **destining us in love,** and Moffatt has preferred this rendering. But perhaps they fit in most naturally with the present verse. Love is the element in which the Christian dwells, and by this he is enabled to live a life which will be blameless in God's sight.

Paul now defines the nature of the predestination. God 5
chose us **to be his sons** (literally, ' for adoption unto himself ') **through Jesus Christ.** To understand the full meaning of Paul's doctrine of adoption we need to remember that under Roman law an adopted son was precisely on the same footing as a real son. Octavius was only the grand-nephew of Julius Caesar, but being adopted he became in all respects his heir. So the Christian enters at once into the full status of sonship, and he receives this adoption through Christ. United with Christ by dying and rising with him he is henceforth related to God as Christ himself is. This adoption of men through Christ was ' in accordance with the purpose of God's will.' Paul may seem to suggest (and his words were so interpreted in the older theology) that God's choice was arbitrary—founded solely on His absolute will. But Paul's aim in the whole passage is to magnify the saving love of God, and his meaning plainly is that our calling to be God's children is so secure that no hostile power can ever reverse it. Grounded in the unchanging will of God, it must stand for ever.

6 The thought that God has chosen us is now linked with another—that He chose us out of His abounding goodness. It is to this same idea that Paul leads up in the great discussion of Predestination in Rom. 9–11. He there deals with the criticism so often urged against the doctrine in times since—that it represents God as arbitrary, with no other motive or standard but that of His sovereign will. How otherwise can He appoint men to salvation before they have done anything good or evil, before they have even come into being ? Paul answers that God so acts because His nature is one of infinite grace. He does not deal with men according to their own deserving, but according to the nature that is in Himself. This conception of the free grace of God is the central one in all Paul's thinking, and his predestination doctrine is nothing, in the last resort, but one of the many ways in which he tries to state it. So here he declares the motive for which God has chosen us : **with a view to the praise of his glorious grace** (literally, ' the glory of his grace '). It is to be noted that this phrase **to** (for) **the praise of his** glory is repeated thrice in the present passage (vers. 6, 12, 14), and is evidently meant, along with the other recurring phrase **in Christ**, to mark out the governing thought. All that God has done for us He has done through Christ, and He has done it for no other motive than that of His own goodness.

As we have already seen (Col. 1 : 27), Paul always uses ' glory ' with reference to the divine nature. **To the praise of his** glory means ' in order to assert his character as God.' The words **glory** and **grace** are here coupled together. We are meant to realize that the distinctive attribute of God is His infinite grace, and this he has **bestowed on us in the Beloved.** The name for Christ which Paul here uses was probably a current messianic title, based on such passages as Ps. 2 : 7 and Isa. 42 : 1. In the present connexion it has a peculiar force and aptness. God has shewn a love to us which is inseparable from that which He bears to Christ, His beloved Son.

7 Thus far Paul has dwelt on God's goodness before the creation, ' in the invisible world.' He now passes to another

part of his thanksgiving, and marks the transition by repeating the phrase *in him*. His new theme is the work of Christ in his actual manifestation on earth. The purpose which God had planned from all eternity was at last fulfilled when Christ appeared and died for us. **In** him **we enjoy** (have) **our redemption, the forgiveness of our trespasses, by the blood he shed.** Paul here repeats what he has said already in Col. 1 : 14, and we shall find him again and again reverting to the language of that epistle; this repetition, as has been pointed out in the Introduction, is not difficult to explain if the epistles were written within a few days of one another. To the verse as it stands in Colossians Paul adds the words **by** (or through) **his blood**—defining the means whereby the redemption was secured. No idea derived from the Jewish sacrificial system is to be attached to **the blood,** which for Paul is always a mere synonym for a violent death. He indeed attributes a sacrificial value to the death of Christ, but this he finds in the self-forgetting love which prompted it, not in its fancied resemblance to a blood-offering. The idea of a ransom in **redemption** likewise is not to be pressed. Paul was not troubled by the questions which arose later as to whom the ransom was paid, why it was exacted, or what it consisted in. The word as he uses it carries with it only the general sense of a deliverance, effected at a great price. Thus he comes
back to the riches of the **grace which God has lavished** 8
upon us, and seeks to shew what this grace has accomplished.
As it has secured for us forgiveness of sins, so it has brought 9
us to that deeper knowledge which is described as **complete insight** (wisdom) **and understanding.** Attempts have been made to distinguish between the meanings of these two words, but this is hardly possible. They are combined in order to emphasize the idea of a full apprehension of the divine counsels.

Throughout the epistle a cardinal place is given to the deeper knowledge which has come to us through Christ, and from this it has sometimes been inferred that the writer's interest in the gospel is mainly intellectual. He might seem to construe it, after the Gnostic manner, as a higher philosophy or a mystical revelation ; and this, it is pointed out, is never the attitude adopted in the genuine writings of Paul. But the fuller knowledge of which the passage speaks is directly connected with the grace of God. If He has given us a new insight into His purposes it is that we may enjoy a closer fellowship with Him and receive more largely of His goodness. The thought is similar to that of John 15 : 15, ‘ Henceforth I call you not servants but friends—for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.’ As in Colossians, the object of the new knowledge is **the open secret** (or mystery) **of his will,** i.e. the secret purpose which has always lain behind His action and directed it. Hitherto men have been unable to enter into true fellowship with God or accept His will, because all His government of the world was a riddle to them. Now, with the coming of Christ, everything has been explained ; full insight has been given into the ‘ mystery.’

In the course of the epistle Paul is to speak of several of the purposes which have determined the action of God. He touches here on the ultimate purpose, the master-key by which we may unlock all the divine counsels. He introduces it by a solemn prelude on **the purpose of his design so to order it in the fulness of the ages.** The thought of ver. 5 is here taken up again, that God's secret plan had its ground in His good pleasure or purpose, His sovereign will. It is therefore bound up with His very nature, and must be regarded as the ultimate truth of things.. But though the plan was formed in the secret of the divine counsels, it was carried into effect in the ordering (*oikonomia*) of the world's history. Paul here uses a word which he is to repeat a number of times in various senses. It applies literally to the management of a house, and is familiar to us in its English form ‘ economy.’ But, as in English, the literal meaning branches out into that of management in general—policy directed to a given end. It is used in the present verse of God's working out of His purpose in His ordering of the world. He had so governed the whole course of time that it should culminate at last in the fulfilment of that profound design on which He had acted since the beginning.

The 'mystery' or **open secret** is now disclosed. It had 10 been God's purpose, and in all His government of the world He had kept it in view, to gather up or reunite in Christ **all things in heaven and earth.** The whole thought of the epistle turns on the idea which is here expressed, by means of a very difficult verb which needs to be examined in some detail (*anakephalaiosasthai*). It is a compound word, made up of a prefix and a main verb which is used in the middle voice. The verb means literally 'to bring to a head,' and was applied, in the first instance, to the adding up of a sum. It was the Greek practice to state the result of an addition at the top of the column of figures instead of at the bottom, and the process of adding was called 'bringing to a head.' From this original use the word was employed in rhetoric for the summary of the chief points in the argument at the end of a discourse. Finally, it came to be applied to any kind of summarizing. It conveyed the general idea of a number of scattered threads which are gathered to a point and knotted together. Thus far the word may be rendered (as in Moffatt's translation) **to gather up**, but the prefix has also to be taken into account. Possibly it serves merely to strengthen the main idea, but more likely it implies, as it commonly does, that the action is repeated. All things are not only **gathered up in Christ**, but 'gathered up again,' 'reunited.' The use of the middle voice, moreover, involves the idea that this reunion was effected by God for Himself. So the 'mystery,' as Paul finally discloses it, is this—that 'God proposed to reunite for Himself all things in Christ.'

How is this thought to be explained? Towards the close of the second century Irenaeus adopted the Pauline term as the watchword of his own theological system. He understood it in the sense which it bore in rhetoric of presenting a résumé of what had gone before—a 'recapitulation' (this word, which has passed into our common language, is the exact translation into Latin of the Greek term). According to Irenaeus the work of Christ had consisted in so repeating the initial events of the world's history as to put right what had gone wrong. Man had been exposed to temptation and had fallen ; Christ had met the same temptations and had resisted. Man had involved himself in death ; Christ had passed through his earthly experiences into life. So at every point Christ had taken up the original plan which had miscarried, and had set it in the way of fulfilment.

It is quite evident, however, that this is not the idea which Paul has in mind. Throughout the epistle he speaks of a work of reconciliation, and here he indicates how it was made possible. God had planned that all things in the world should work together in perfect harmony, but the original harmony had somehow been broken. The world as God designed it became as we see it now—the scene of a universal conflict, which is reflected in the inner discord of man's own life. How this flaw, which runs through the whole of creation, came to be, Paul does not inquire. At a later time this was the chief theme of speculation among the Gnostics, who concluded that in the heavenly sphere itself there had been some primal catastrophe which had affected the whole universe. Paul also believes that the final causes of all that happens must be sought 'in the heavenly places,' but he does not venture to explore this mysterious background, and is content to accept the fact that the harmony designed by God has come to ruin ; all the strands by which the world was originally knit together have been severed. It is God's purpose to reunite them in Christ. He is to be the centre to which all things will be related. When all the forces that govern them flow from this one source they will be brought again into harmony, and this, according to Paul, is God's secret plan, towards which He has been moving all through the ages.

The reunion in Christ is to embrace all existence 'in heaven and on earth.' In Colossians also the work of salvation is made to include the world of angels as well as men, but Paul's object there is to expose the futility of the heretical angel-worship. He shews that the supernatural beings who have been put in the place of Christ are themselves in need of his redeeming power. In Ephesians the controversial motive is absent. Paul seeks merely to give expression to his thought that the whole universe has become subject to discord. Just as on earth there is conflict everywhere, so there is confusion in the invisible world, and the harmony which God intended can only be restored through Christ.

Into his hymn of thanksgiving Paul now introduces another 11 of the cardinal ideas which he is to develop in the course of the epistle. He has spoken of God's purpose to reunite all things in Christ, and he intends to shew how this work of reconciliation has begun in the union of Jews and Gentiles within the Church. On this union he now touches, speaking first of the call extended to Israel, to which he himself belonged. **In Christ, in whom we have had our heritage allotted us (as was decreed in the design of him who carries out everything according to the counsel of his will).** The idea of a special **heritage** appointed to Israel meets us frequently in the Old Testament. It has reference in the first instance to the promised land which God had reserved for His people, but the land itself is regarded as the pledge and symbol of a spiritual privilege. As God had placed Israel in a favoured land so He had given it a peculiar right to His love and protection. By the use of the first person plural (**us**) Paul includes himself in the race which had this special claim to a **heritage.** Once again he lays stress on the act of sovereign will by which God had made choice of Israel. In Rom. 9–11 he discusses this question at length, and argues that Israel, having been once chosen by God, cannot finally be rejected. A similar thought is suggested by the present passage. The claim of Israel rests on God's will, but this will is not arbitrary. It involves the grace of God, which, once bestowed, must endure forever.

Paul admits, then, that a special privilege has been vouchsafed to Israel, but is careful to add that this must not lead 12 to the racial pride and self-complacency which marked the average Jew. God had chosen Israel that we should **redound to the praise of his glory by being the first to put our hope in Christ.** This may mean (as Moffatt suggests by rendering thus) that the Jews, owing to their favoured position, had been able to put their hope in Christ before the Gentiles had yet heard of him. More likely Paul meant, ' we who hoped before in Christ.' He is throwing his mind back over the past history of the Jewish people. Ages before Christ had appeared they had known that he was coming and had been looking forward to him. Their religion, in the last resort, had turned on the hope for Christ, and the purpose of God in thus revealing His secret to them was to ensure **the praise of his glory.** He desired that this one race should know Him in His true character as the gracious God, who would at last bring redemption. For His own sake, and not from any partiality to Israel, He had chosen it as His people.

13 From his own countrymen Paul now turns to the Gentiles, to whom he is writing. **You also have heard the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation.** The word **truth** is one of the most difficult words in the New Testament, and is used in a great variety of meanings. The main idea attached to it seems to be that of final revelation. Hitherto all had been conveyed by way of hint and symbol; the real purpose of God with men was now made manifest. The gospel is thus called **the message of the truth,** and is further defined as **the gospel of your salvation,** i.e. the announcement of a divine favour granted to you Gentiles. Not only have they heard the message but they have believed it, and in consequence of this **faith have been stamped with the seal of the long-promised holy Spirit.** The reference is apparently to the rite of baptism, conferred on those who had professed a true faith in Christ. Frequently in the New Testament baptism is called a **seal,** and this word is also applied to the Jewish rite of circumcision. It was taken over from the religious language of the time, and seems, in the first instance, to have been meant literally. The devotee of a god was accustomed to have himself tattooed with the sacred emblem of his particular cult. As the owner's seal was **stamped** on his personal belongings, so the god was supposed to mark out his votary.

It is apparently to this custom that Paul refers when he says in Gal. 6 : 17, 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.' He thinks of the scars left on him by his many hardships as so many sacred marks which proclaim him to be the servant of Christ. Baptism was not a visible emblem, stamped in the flesh, but it ratified the surrender to Christ, and was called a **seal.** It was a sealing **with the holy Spirit,** which was supposed, in the moment of baptism, to descend on the believer, and which is here described as ' the Spirit of promise.' This may imply that through the Spirit a right is secured to us in God's promise. More likely (as our translation indicates) the phrase means simply **the promised Spirit** (cf. Gal. 3 : 14, Acts 2 : 39). It was believed in the early church that the coming of the Spirit had fulfilled the prophecy in Joel 2 : 28—' it shall come to pass in the last days that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.'

The Spirit which has thus been given in fulfilment of God's 14 promise is **the pledge of our heritage.** One of Paul's favourite conceptions of the Spirit is this of a **pledge**—the earnest-money or first **instalment** of a payment which finally is to be made in full. The image vividly expresses the significance which Paul ascribes to the possession of the Spirit. The future life, as he conceives it, is wholly spiritual, and on earth, amidst our bondage to material things, we can only imagine it and look forward to it ; but even now Christ has given us the Spirit, which belongs to the higher world and brings with it the promise and foretaste of what is in store. By means of it we enter already on the immortal life, and can devote ourselves to those higher ends which, under the future conditions, will be all in all. When he thus calls the Spirit **the pledge of our heritage,** Paul again takes over the Old Testament word which was applied to the promised land reserved for Israel. For Christians the **heritage** or inheritance is the full enjoyment of fellowship with God in the eternal world. Not only is the Spirit **the pledge** of what is to come, but it is an active power which will fulfil for us that which it promises. A first **instalment** is not always followed by a complete payment, but in the Spirit God has given us the means for the obtaining of **our divine possession.** This translation probably gives the true meaning of a somewhat ambiguous phrase. The word which is rendered **obtain** is also Paul's usual word for redemption, while the other term **possession** appears in the Greek Old Testament as a name for Israel, the chosen race. So the phrase (' until the redemption of the purchased possession '—A.V.) has sometimes been taken in this sense, ' with a view to the ransoming of God's people.' This, however, would introduce a formal and prosaic note into a lofty passage, and would also be irrelevant to the thought present in Paul's mind. The word ' redemption,' in Greek as in English, may be used in a wider as well as a more definite sense. It means something more than ' obtaining,' since it implies that what is now secured had previously been lost (cf. to ' redeem ' one's reputation or one's patrimony). This idea may be suggested here. Men had been destined for a glorious inheritance which they have lost through sin, and the Spirit has been given them that they may redeem it.

The word **possession,** too, while sometimes used in a specific sense for Israel, has more often the wider meaning. So, when we take the phrase in its connexion with what has just been said, it means that by His Spirit, bestowed on us according to His promise, God has given us the assurance of a life to come, and has also enabled us so to serve Him on earth as to win for ourselves the full possession of that higher life. The passage closes with the phrase which has run through it like a refrain, **to the praise of his glory.** All that God has done for us He has done for His own sake, to manifest His character as the gracious, bountiful God. As we think of the place to which He has exalted us, there is no room for human pride. We can only be overwhelmed with the sense of a divine goodness which is beyond our power to conceive.

Looking back on this introductory passage as a whole we have to note : (1) the impressive character of the language, which is that of a prayer or hymn rather than of an epistle ; (2) the frequent repetition of certain phrases, **in him, the counsel of his will, to the praise of his glory**—a repetition which is evidently intentional. At the very outset Paul seeks to emphasize two ideas in the light of which the subsequent thought has to be understood : that God does everything through Christ, and that the one motive by which He acts is His sovereign will. (3) In this prelude we have a forecast of the main theme of the epistle, viz. that the Christian salvation is part of a great plan which embraces the whole universe.

PRAYER (1 : 15–19)

Hence, as I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and 15
your love for all the saints, I never cease to give thanks 16
for you, when I mention you in my prayers. May the 17
God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, grant
you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation for the knowledge
of himself, illuminating the eyes of your heart so that 18
you can understand the hope to which He calls us, the
wealth of his glorious heritage in the saints, and the 19
surpassing greatness of his power over us believers.

In Greek letters of the period the formula of thanksgiving was usually followed by a pious wish that the gods might continue their protection of the person addressed. Paul adopts this practice in his epistles, changing the conventional phrases into the language of genuine prayer. In Ephesians the opening prayer becomes vital to the epistle ; all the main sections may be regarded as an extension of the prayer, which continues with brief interruptions to the end of chap. 3. The theme of the prayer is that the readers may come to a fuller knowledge of that salvation which has been described in the thanksgiving. While he thus prays that they may attain to fuller knowledge Paul dwells on the wonder and greatness of the divine gift which they are called on to know. He dwells also on the significance of the fact that the gift has been bestowed on all, so that a single Church of Christ has been formed from the union of Jews and Gentiles. This unity of the Church is brought into relation to the great truth that all things have been reunited in Christ.

As often in the epistles, Paul marks the beginning of a new 15 section by a **Hence** or ‘ wherefore,’ but all that it denotes is some loose connexion with what has preceded. If there is any real sequence of thought it would seem to be ‘ since the

Christian salvation means so much, I pray that you may be worthy of it.' The manner in which Paul refers to himself is also peculiar ; literally the prayer opens, 'Hence I too.' It might appear as if he thought of someone else who had offered the same prayer, or as if he wished to suggest that his readers on their part were praying for him. But probably he only intends to throw additional weight on the pronoun : I who am now writing to you, **as I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and** towards **all the saints.** Paul indicates here that he knew of his readers only by report, and this alone is conclusive proof that he is not writing to Ephesus, the church in which he had laboured for three years. The report had been a highly favourable one, but the manner in which he describes it is difficult to explain. Everywhere else in his writings he makes Christ the sole object of faith, but here he seems to couple faith in Christ with faith in Christ's people. From the first this combination was felt to be strange, and in some MSS. 'faith in the saints' was changed into **love for all the saints.** The text followed by Moffatt adopts this reading, but the best evidence is against it. Certainly it must be granted that Paul could never have contemplated a faith which was directed both to Christ and to Christian men. The faith he speaks of must be something different from the attitude of soul which he commonly denotes by the word—not faith in the religious sense, but 'fidelity,' 'loyalty.' Moreover, the preposition used in the first clause does not imply a faith directed to Christ but one which is rooted in him, or exercised in the sphere in which he reigns. The meaning appears to be 'your loyalty as manifested in your individual Christian lives and in your relations towards the church.'

16 With this confidence in his readers Paul proceeds : **I never cease to give thanks for you, when I mention you in my prayers.** He gives thanks for what they have attained to
17 already and prays that in addition to all this **the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father,** may **grant you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation for** (in) **the knowledge of himself.** A number of times in the New Testament we find

God described as the God, or the God and Father, of Christ. In Gnosticism the title gave rise to the strange belief that the God revealed by Jesus was one who had been hitherto unknown. It was maintained that the Creator God of the Old Testament was an inferior divinity, vindictive and tyrannical, from whom Christ had set us free by revealing another God, the supreme and eternal, whose nature was one of love. Needless to say, there was nothing of this kind in the thought of the New Testament writers. When they speak of **the God of Jesus Christ** they mean only that Christ has fully revealed Him, and that we now have full access to Him through Christ. He is called **the glorious Father** (literally, the 'Father of glory') to mark the two ideas that we can look to Him trustfully as to our Father, and that He is yet infinitely high above us, reigning in the world of light. Paul prays that He may **grant the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.** It is difficult to say whether the reference is to the holy Spirit or merely to a mind or disposition ('a spirit'). The absence of the article suggests the latter view, but in 1 Cor. 2 Paul contends that the deep things of God can only be known by possession of the Spirit of God, and a similar thought seems to be implied here. In any case, what Paul desires is that his readers may have the insight which can perceive hidden truth. **Revelation** is the term correlative to 'mystery.' As there are secrets which God has concealed, so there is a wisdom, given by Himself, which can discover them. The meaning of the term is illustrated by the title of our New Testament book of Revelation, i.e. the disclosure of the hidden counsels of God.

Paul prays that the Spirit or spirit of insight may be given 'in the knowledge of himself.' This does not mean **for the knowledge** (as in our translation), nor yet 'consisting in the knowledge.' The phrase implies rather 'in your efforts to know him.' Perhaps Paul is thinking of such tendencies as he has combated in the epistle to Colossians. In their desire to attain to a higher knowledge many Christians were tempted to fall in with those half-Pagan speculations which seemed to open up new vistas of truth, not to be found in the simple gospel. He is anxious that his readers may be directed in their search by a light which can always distinguish between the false and the true.

18 For this higher knowledge it is necessary **that the eyes of the heart may be illuminated** or enlightened. According to primitive ideas, the heart was the seat of the intelligence, and is often thus described in the Old Testament (cf. 'a wise and understanding heart'). The New Testament writers take over this mode of speaking, with the difference that they identify the heart with the higher intelligence, in which the will and emotions co-operate with the mind. Faith, for Paul, is an activity of the heart (cf. Rom. 10 : 10), not a mere assent of the reason, but an attitude of man's whole nature. In the present verse therefore he thinks of much more than a clearing of the mental vision. In order to attain to the knowledge of God men must be inwardly renewed; their mental perceptions must be controlled by a new will and imagination. It needs to be remembered all through this epistle that the **knowledge** on which a constant emphasis is laid is this higher kind of knowledge. Paul's thought approaches that which is expressed in the Beatitude, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' The word **illuminated** or 'enlightened' was used in the Mystery religions in a technical sense for the rite of initiation. Perhaps it was originally connected with some culminating moment in which the initiate suddenly emerged from a dark chamber in the shrine into a blaze of light. This illumination was supposed to represent the new condition of his soul. From its use in the Mystery religions, however, the word had passed into the general religious language of the time, and is so employed in the New Testament. In Heb. 6 : 4 it signifies conversion, and it came at a later date to denote the act of baptism in which conversion was ratified. When Paul uses the word here he no doubt means it to bear its religious connotation. The **eyes of the heart** are to be not merely purified but irradiated with light from above.

He now touches on the effects of the higher knowledge. **That you can understand the hope to which He calls us, the**

wealth of his glorious heritage in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of his power over (or towards) **us believers.** It might appear as if Paul were here only piling up a number of synonymous phrases to emphasize the greatness of what is given us in the gospel. But when we look more closely into the sentence we can see that three distinct things are carefully noted and described: (1) the fact of an eternal life; (2) the wonder and glory of it; (3) the presence in us even now of a power that will realize it. Paul has already spoken of the new life as a **heritage** or 'inheritance,' and the words in which he extols it here may be translated **the wealth of his glorious heritage.** Yet 'wealth' and 'glory' are better taken together; 'the abounding glory of the inheritance' which he has in store for us. The phrase translated **in** (or among) **the saints** is ambiguous. It may mean: (1) in the holy places, since the word used was often applied to the Temple or its inner shrine; (2) among the people of Christ—taking **saints** in its usual sense as a Christian designation; (3) among the holy ones, i.e. the whole company of angels and redeemed men. This would appear to represent the real thought in the writer's mind. He is thinking not of an inheritance which his readers will finally share with their Christian brethren, but of their adoption into the host of angelic beings. Like the writer to the Hebrews, he foresees the day when Christ's people will join 'the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven' (Heb. 12 : 22, 23).

The third divine fact to which knowledge is to be directed 19 is **the surpassing greatness of his power over us who believe.** It is one of the fundamental thoughts of Paul that by faith we lay hold of the power of God. By ourselves we can do nothing, but through Christ we can ensure that God will effect for us more than we can ask or think.

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST (1 : 20–23)

A power which operates with the strength of the might which 20
he exerted in raising Christ from the dead and *seating him*

21 **_at his right hand_ in the heavenly sphere, above all the**
angelic Rulers, Authorities, Powers, and Lords, above
every Name that is to be named not only in this age but
22 **in the age to come—_he has put everything under his feet_**
and set him as head over everything for the church, the
23 **church which is his Body, filled by him who fills the**
universe entirely.

20 **This power operates with the strength of the might which he exerted in raising Christ from the dead.** Here again we have the heaping together of a number of words which seem to have almost a synonymous meaning. This is characteristic of the style of Ephesians, and sometimes gives the impression of mere rhetorical repetition. It will be found, however, that in every instance Paul has a purpose in what may look, at first sight, like an aimless accumulation of words. In the present instance he speaks of the divine power (1) in its manifest effect, (2) in its own character, (3) in its relation to an infinite reservoir of power. One might illustrate the three ideas from any great agency of nature, e.g. the force exerted by a huge cataract which has behind it a mighty volume of waters. The whole clause might be translated 'the operation of a power arising from a divine strength.' This power, it is added, works in us according as it worked in Christ when he rose from the dead. For Paul the supreme manifestation of the power of God was Christ's Resurrection. He prays in Phil. 3 : 10, 'that I may know the power of the Resurrection,' for to know God in that crowning act is to win the assurance that all things are possible to Him. Not only did God display His power in the raising of Christ, but this power which worked in Christ continues to work in Christ's people. It is through faith in the Resurrection that they yield themselves to the divine might which will create in them a new life (cf. Rom. 4 : 24).

As the power of God raised Christ from the dead it also exalted him to God's right hand. It must never be forgotten that for Paul the death of Christ is inseparable from his Resurrection and Ascension. These are the three aspects of one divine act. Whenever he speaks of the Cross Paul has in mind the sequel to it which was the other side of its meaning and to which the faith of the Christian is equally directed. In the present passage he has a special reason for his explicit reference to the Ascension. The whole epistle is dominated by the thought that Christ is supreme, and that all God's purposes are effected through him. The digression on the greatness of the divine power has for a moment led away from this thought, but Paul now returns to it. Christ rose from the dead by the power of God that he might assume his place for ever at God's right hand.

Quoting again from the Psalm, which was regarded in the early Church as prophetic, above all others, of the Messiah, Paul tells how God exalted Christ, **seating him at his right hand in the heavenly sphere.** This phrase, as we have seen, is used in the epistle of the invisible world. Paul indicates by means of it that the enthronement of Christ is not to be understood in some crude literal sense. It typifies a divine event of which we cannot guess the nature, and which belonged to that higher sphere which is beyond our vision.
By this exaltation Christ was placed above every Princedom, 21
Authority, Power, and Lordship. As in Col. 1 : 16 Paul enumerates the highest classes of angelic beings. His purpose in Colossians was to maintain, against the heretics, that these beings are not to be worshipped along with Christ or in his place. Here he is simply affirming that, however high their rank, they have now been made subordinate to Christ. To his list of the angelic powers he adds comprehensively **every Name that is to be named not only in this age but in the age to come.** The **Name**, as frequently in biblical language, here stands for the person, with the further suggestion of exalted office. This is brought out explicitly by the added words **which is to be named**, i.e. uttered with reverence. The idea of two ages is taken over from Jewish apocalyptic thought, which divided the whole course of history into ' the present age,' extending from the creation to now, and ' the coming age ' or Kingdom of God, when God alone will reign.

In later New Testament doctrine the conception of the two ages is merged in that of the two worlds—the visible world and that of unseen reality. As a result of this modified idea (which goes back to Platonic speculation) the Christian redemption is conceived not as lying in the future but as effected here and now. By faith in Christ the believer is lifted out of the earthly sphere, and has part already in that higher order which exists already in the heavenly world. It is this conception which is here in Paul's mind. He thinks of angelic powers which control the material world and of others which belong to the realm of higher reality.

22 Having thus exalted Christ, God **put everything under his feet.** The quotation from Ps. 110 is combined with another from Ps. 8, which was hardly less significant for early Christian thought. There can be no doubt that the true subject of the Psalm is the greatness of man, whom God has crowned with glory and honour and made sovereign over all His works. In Rabbinical speculation the Psalm had probably been applied already to the Messiah—the heavenly, prototypal Man. This is the sense in which it is understood in the New Testament. In 1 Cor. 15 : 25–27 Paul dwells on the very words which he quotes here, and argues from them that death itself will finally be destroyed by Christ, since all things are to be **put under his feet.** The same words are emphasized in Heb. 2 : 8–9 as evidence that the earthly humiliation of Christ was to be followed by his exaltation. They are referred to likewise in 1 Pet. 3 : 22, where it is declared as here that all the angelic powers have now been subjected to Christ. The passage in 1 Peter is almost certainly an echo of that before us—a significant proof of the early date of our epistle.

Another turn is now given to the idea of the supremacy of Christ. As God exalted him to the highest place so He **set him as head over everything for the church.** The closing verse of the chapter is exceedingly difficult, and this is the more unfortunate, as it is evidently cardinal for the understanding of the whole epistle. Paul is to deal in the following chapters with the significance of the Church, and he seems here to be condensing in a single sentence the idea which determines his thought. But while the general sense can be understood it is almost impossible to fix the precise meaning. In the first part of the sentence it seems better to translate 'to the church' than **for the church.** Paul does not think of Christ as supreme over all things for the benefit of the Church, but rather conversely. He is the head of the Church in order that finally he may be head of all existence. The Church is to be his instrument whereby he is to exercise a universal power. Thus two ideas are combined in a single clause—Christ is everywhere supreme, and his supremacy manifests itself in a visible and unique manner in the Church.

In this manner we are probably to explain the very difficult 23
words which follow: **which is his Body,** 'the fulness of him who fills all things in all.' The previous thought seems here to be repeated in a different form. Christ **fills the whole universe,** but in a more special sense the Church is his 'fulness'—the sphere in which he reigns and directly exercises his power. But why is the Church, as the body of Christ, described as his 'fulness'? This perplexing word has already been discussed in connexion with Col. 1:19, where we saw that it is capable of two meanings: (*a*) something filled in, to make up for a deficiency; (*b*) a sum total or fulfilment. In the present passage it has sometimes been taken in the first of these two senses. Just as the body is necessary to complete the head, so the Church is like an extension of the life of Christ. He contains in himself all vital forces, but has need of the Church to make them fully operative, in this way resembling the head, which can do nothing without the instrumentality of the body. The other interpretation, however, is much more in keeping with Paul's general thought. The Church is the 'fulness' of Christ in the sense that it is **filled by him**—pervaded in all its parts with his life, and so wrought into an organic whole.

Paul intends to shew how the great work of reconciliation has begun in the Church, in which all opposing elements have been brought together. What Christ has done in the Church he is to do for the whole universe, and this is expressed in the closing words 'who fulfils all things in all.' The verb which Paul uses may bear a passive sense, and some commentators (e.g. Robinson) would insist on its being so translated: 'who in all things is being fulfilled.' But it is simpler to take the verb in the middle voice, 'who fulfils for himself all things,' i.e. brings them, in all their parts, to fulfilment. In other words, Paul falls back on the idea of ver. 10, that the whole creation is to be reunited in Christ. It is God's purpose that Christ should be the great centre on which all things converge, from which they derive their life and meaning, by which they are brought into harmony. This work of reconciliation has begun in the Church, which is like the microcosm of what all existence will finally be. Not only so, but the Church is destined to be the instrument for accomplishing this greater end. It is the sphere in which the power of Christ is immediately exercised and from which it will radiate out to the very confines of the universe.

THE SALVATION WHICH HAS COME TO JEWS AND GENTILES ALIKE (2 : 1–10)

ii.

1 And as with us so with you. You were dead in the trespasses
2 and sins in which you moved as you followed the course
of this world, under the sway of the prince of the air—
3 the spirit which is at present active within those sons of
disobedience among whom all of us once lived, we as well
as you, when we obeyed the passions of our flesh, carrying
out the dictates of the flesh and its impulses, when we
were objects of God's anger by nature, like the rest of
4 men. But, dead in trespasses as we were, God was so
5 rich in mercy that for his great love to us he made us live
together with Christ (it is by grace you have been saved);
6 together with Christ he raised and seated us within the
7 heavenly sphere in Christ Jesus, to display throughout
ages to come his surpassing wealth of grace and goodness
8 toward us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have
been saved, as you had faith; it is not your doing but
9 God's gift, not the outcome of what you have done—lest

anyone should pride himself on that; God has made us 10
what we are, creating us in Christ Jesus for the good deeds which are prepared beforehand by God as our sphere of action.

Paul has spoken of the divine power which had raised Christ from the dead and had therefore worked for life in Christ's people. As he thought of this power he was led into a digression on the infinite significance of what Christ had done. Now he returns to the point at which he had broken off. He reminds his readers of how the life-giving power of Christ had worked in themselves. Although Gentiles, sunk in all the evil of the Gentile world, they had been transformed into new men, and had found a place among the people of God. The grace which had saved them had been most clearly manifest in redeeming men from heathenism, but it had displayed itself equally when bestowed on the Jews. They also had been in bondage to sin—all the more so because they were wrapt in a fancied security and did not understand their need. Through Christ God had visited both Jews and Gentiles and made them partakers together of the new life.

'And you, when you were dead in your trespasses and 1
sins'—so the passage opens literally; the verb does not come till ver. 5 (**he made us live**). Paul had meant, apparently, to devote the whole section to an account of what God had done specially for the Gentiles, but he has hardly begun when he realizes that all this applies equally to himself and his countrymen. The sentence runs into a parenthesis in which Jews and Gentiles are both included, and when the verb comes it is not merely **he** *made you live* but **he made us live, both together.** He begins, however, with an emphatic reference to the Gentiles and the life of sin from which they had been delivered. The power which had raised Christ from physical death had raised them also when they were spiritually dead. Hitherto they had **moved** 2
(literally, walked) in the paths of sin. Paul here employs the usual Old Testament word for conduct. The book of Psalms opens with a blessing on him 'that walketh not in the

counsel of the wicked.' The whole body of laws relating to conduct was known as the 'Halachah,' the 'Walking.' The 'walk' of the heathen had **followed the course** (literally, age) **of this world**, i.e. the present age which is governed solely by gross and earth-bound motives. It will be noted that the primitive conception of the two ages is combined with the later Hellenistic conception of the two worlds (cf. 1 : 21). The 'present age' is not merely antecedent to the 'coming age,' but is subject to the powers of evil.

This is brought out clearly in the words that follow: **under the sway of the prince of the air.** Paul thinks of a sovereign authority with a confederation of forces under his control, and conceives of him as ruling from **the air.** This idea, strange to our modern minds, is illustrated by a number of passages in the apocalyptic literature. It was believed that the habitation of evil spirits was the upper atmosphere, midway between the heavenly region and the abode of men. The belief is reflected in the saying of Jesus, 'I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven.' In Gnosticism this conception was worked out in an elaborate form, and was associated with the astrological ideas which were so prominent in the thinking of the time. The planetary spheres were supposed to mark the domain of the hostile powers, each of the 'world-rulers' being enthroned in a separate planet. At the head of them was the Demiurge (often identified with the God of the Old Testament), whose abode was the planet Saturn. Perhaps there is a hint of these speculations in 6 : 12 of the present epistle. In that later passage the evil powers are described as **in the heavenly sphere**, while here they are in **the air.**

A number of allusions in Paul's writings are to be explained in the light of the astrology and demonology of his time. It need not be doubted that he fully accepted those contemporary beliefs, which corresponded in the first century to our modern scientific and psychological theories. This element in his teaching is certainly out of date, as much of our present-day science will no doubt be in another century. But his religious ideas are never to be confounded with those contemporary beliefs by means of which he tries to illustrate and define them. Here, for example, he is seeking to bring home to his readers the mysterious nature of evil. Men are tempted to sinful deeds by dark forces which they cannot understand, and which they cannot in their own strength control. The truth is equally valid whether we explain those forces in terms of heredity and the subconscious or of first-century demonology.

Satan, or more probably the whole group of powers of which he is the head, is described as **the spirit which is at present active within the sons of disobedience.** This account of the heathen is to be understood in the light of Rom. 1 : 18 f., where their desperate moral condition is traced back to their refusal to know God when He was clearly revealed to them by His works in nature and His law written in their hearts. As a result He 'had given them over to a reprobate mind.' This perversion of will in the heathen is here ascribed to the agency of the evil powers. Paul seems to be glancing at the theory which he states more fully in 1 Cor. 10 : 19 f. and 1 Cor. 8. He believes that the so-called gods of the Gentiles are nothing in reality but demons who pretend to divinity in order to delude and enslave their worshippers. (Milton has made splendid use of this conception in his account of the Satanic host in the first book of *Paradise Lost.*) The heathen have thus been led into **disobedience** by the idolatry imposed on them by the Powers of the air.

Paul has set out by describing the apostasy of the heathen, 3 but he now reflects that 'we all shared their life once'; Jews as well as Gentiles had disregarded the will of God, though it had been clearly set before them in the Law. The reign of evil, due primarily to the action of demonic powers, is now explained from the side of actual experience. We are drawn into sin by living in **the passions of our flesh, carrying out** (obeying) **the dictates of the flesh and its impulses** (or, 'thoughts,' here in a bad sense, 'the wayward fancies'). There is a similar transition in the epistle to the Romans, where Paul explains the origin of evil first as due to the fall of Adam and then to man's intrinsic nature as a being of

flesh. This is Paul's characteristic view, and he invariably falls back on it. Man is a spiritual creature who has become entangled in the flesh, and this enslavement of the higher nature by the lower is the true cause of all his sin and misery. In consequence of their bondage to the flesh the Jews also **were by nature** (i.e. in their natural state) **objects of God's anger, like the rest of men.** The **anger** or wrath of which Paul is thinking is the divine sentence which will be passed on evil-doers at the final Judgment. All men, Jews and Gentiles alike, are liable to this sentence of ' Guilty ' in view of their sinful lives. By a Hebrew idiom they are called literally ' children of wrath,' i.e. objects of God's wrath, 4 destined to punishment. But **God,** being **so rich in mercy, for his great love to us made us live together with Christ, even when we were dead in trespasses.**

In the previous chapter Paul has spoken of the salvation through Christ as if it were due to God's absolute will. According to His own inscrutable counsel He had predestined us to share in His glory. Here, however, expression is given to the thought which lies behind the doctrine of predestination, and apart from which it cannot be understood. That absolute will by which God acts is one with His infinite love. Because of His love He raised us to life when we were spiritually dead. The thought of the verse is that of Rom. 5 : 8 : ' God commendeth his love to us in that while we were yet sinners 5 Christ died for us.' The verb on which the whole previous sentence has depended is now at last introduced. **He made us live together with Christ.** Two ideas are combined in this phrase : (1) Jews and Gentiles, who have hitherto been separated, are united in this new life ; (2) as they rise **together** with each other so they rise along **with Christ.** His Resurrection involved the rising into a higher condition of all who have become one with him through faith. Paul's mind is fixed, however, not so much on the nature of the new life as on the divine love which has bestowed it on us. So in an emphatic parenthesis he declares, **it is by grace you have been saved,** and these words are repeated in ver. 8. The central idea of Paul's whole theology here finds expression. He holds that Christianity, as opposed to the Law, was the revelation that God does not bargain with men but gives freely, out of His own love. **Grace** has unfortunately become a theological word, with subtle and controversial meanings, but Paul's conception is at bottom a perfectly simple one—that the nature of God is to give, and that man's attitude therefore must be one of trust and receptivity. Nothing is required of man but a faith which answers to the Grace of God.

Paul now takes up again the idea that we have been **made to live together with Christ** and shews what is involved in
this sharing of Christ's experience ; **together with Christ he** 6
raised us up and seated us within the heavenly sphere in Christ Jesus. We are reminded of passages in the sister epistles in which the same thought is expressed in different words : *Your life is hidden with Christ in God* (Col. 3 : 3), *We are a colony of heaven* (Phil. 3 : 20). By the act of faith which has united them with Christ his followers have already entered on the immortal life. Their true condition will only be manifest in the future, when they have been set free from everything that binds them to this earth ; but even now they belong to that invisible world in which Christ dwells. As he thus thinks of the far-reaching import of that change we have undergone through Christ, Paul throws his mind forward into the infinite future.

God has saved us **in order that** He may **display throughout** 7
ages to come his surpassing wealth of grace and goodness toward us in Christ Jesus. The new life now begun will endure for ever, so that the manifestation of God's grace will be always renewing itself. To bring out more forcibly this idea of a goodness that will extend through all eternity Paul speaks not of the ' age ' but of **the ages** yet to come. With a like purpose he heaps up words to describe the magnitude of
the divine goodness, and declares once more, **for by grace** 8
you have been saved, as you had faith. This time he dwells on the condition of faith which is necessary on our part before the grace can be operative. It is faith only that can avail, for salvation **is not your doing but God's gift.** Since

it thus comes to us out of the pure goodness of God, nothing is wanted from us but the willingness to receive. By misguided efforts of our own we frustrate God's will to help us, like the drowning man who refuses simply to trust himself to his rescuer and makes futile exertions that only hamper. The Law had made everything depend on **works**, on the merit which men might acquire by strict obedience. But Paul perceives that this method of seeking salvation is bound
9 to defeat itself; **not the outcome of what you have done** (literally, not of works)—**lest any man should pride himself** (boast) **on that.** The confidence in one's own merit can only foster a self-righteous self-satisfied temper, and when this has taken possession of a man he has ceased to feel the need of the grace of God—his heart is closed against receiving it. In these vers. 8 and 9 Paul gives a brief summary of the thesis which he develops by means of theological argument in the epistle to Romans. Much of that argument is highly abstract and difficult to follow, but it will be seen that the idea at the heart of it is simple and belongs to the very essence of the gospel. Jesus himself gave expression to it, without confusing it with any intricacies of doctrine, when he declared, 'Except ye become as little children ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of heaven.'

10 In a final verse Paul repeats, in a yet stronger form, his conviction that all is given to us by God. **God has made us what we are**, i.e. we Christians are His making, we owe nothing to ourselves. As God made the first man by His own creative act, so He has made men anew through the redemptive work of Christ. It was affirmed in the previous verse that the new life was not to be attained by **works**, but this thought is now repeated in almost startling fashion. So far from the new life resulting from a man's good works, the good works or deeds are not possible until the new life has come to us through the grace of God. We are created **in Christ Jesus for the good deeds, which are prepared beforehand by God as our sphere of action.** God has so created us anew that we now have the capacity to know and do His will. We can thus perform good works without conscious effort,

almost without our own volition. This is expressed by saying that God has **prepared the good deeds beforehand.** The Christian finds them, as it were, waiting for him, and has nothing to do but take possession of them. In other words, the doing of them is now his very nature. Just as he breathes and moves his limbs unconsciously, because God has so made his body, he devotes himself to good actions because they are part and parcel of the new life which God has given. Even the good works which we regard as wholly the outcome of our own will have in the last resort been done for us by God.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE GENTILES (2 : 11–18)

Remember, then, that once upon a time you Gentiles in 11
the flesh, who are called ' the Uncircumcision ' by that so-
called ' Circumcision ' which is itself the product of human
hands in the flesh—remember you were in those days out- 12
side Christ, aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, and
strangers to the covenants of the Promise, devoid of hope
and God within the world. Whereas now, within Christ 13
Jesus, you who once were ***far away*** **have been brought** ***near***
by the blood of Christ. For he is our ***peace,*** **he who has** 14
made both of us a unity and destroyed the barrier which
kept us apart ; in his own flesh he put an end to the feud 15
of the Law with its code of commands, so as to make
peace by the creation of a new Man in himself out of both
parties, so as himself to give the death-blow to that feud 16
by reconciling them both to God in one Body through the
cross ; he came ***with a gospel of peace for those far away*** 17
(that is, for you) ***and for those who were near,*** **for it is** 18
through him that we both enjoy our access to the Father
in one Spirit.

Paul takes up the train of thought which he had intended to follow at the beginning of the chapter. He had addressed himself specially to the Gentiles, reminding them how God had raised them when they were spiritually dead into new life. This thought of what God had done for the Gentiles had merged in the larger one of God's amazing goodness to all men, but the address to the Gentiles is now resumed. In spite of their evil past they have shared in the new creation which has been effected through Christ, and are therefore on the same footing as Israel. Old differences have been transcended, and there is now a new humanity, in which all are reconciled to each other and to God.

11 The passage begins (vers. 11 and 12) with a description of the former condition of the Gentiles. Stress is now laid, not as before on their moral degradation, but on their exclusion from religious privilege. **Remember, then, that once upon a time you Gentiles in the flesh**—Paul wishes to suggest that the religious inferiority of the Gentiles had been only temporary and artificial. They had always had a place in God's love, and the barrier that separated them from God, though it involved real disabilities, had been **in the flesh**, an external barrier, which counted for much more with men than with God Himself. This is brought out in the next words: **you who are called 'the Uncircumcision,' by that so-called 'Circumcision' which is itself the product of human hands in the flesh.** The Jews, priding themselves on the outward mark which declared them to be God's people, had despised the Gentiles and called them by an opprobrious name. But the rite to which they attached so much importance had at best a symbolic value. In Col. 2 : 11 it is contrasted with an immaterial circumcision, i.e. one effected by the Spirit, and securing in very deed what the other only typified.

12 Continuing his address to the Gentiles Paul reminds them that they had formerly suffered not merely under a fancied inferiority but under a real privation. **Remember you were in those days outside Christ.** This phrase is to be taken as the opposite of **within Christ** in the verse that follows. Paul is not thinking of the miserable condition of men disowned by Christ, but is merely contrasting the previous status of his readers with their present one. They, who are now members of the Christian church, had never even heard of Christ. In consequence of this ignorance they were **aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the**

covenants of the Promise. The word translated **aliens** is literally 'alienated from'; but since the Gentiles had never belonged to Israel they could not be estranged from it, and Paul must use the word as meaning nothing more than 'foreigners.' He is thinking of an ancient city-state which was made up of free citizens and also of resident aliens who could exercise no civic rights. This metaphor is further carried out by the addition of **strangers**—aliens who were not even resident but outsiders altogether.

In contrast to this mass of foreigners, Israel proudly regarded itself as the **commonwealth**, the body of free citizens. Paul himself appears to allow this claim. When he asks in Rom. 3 : 1: 'What advantage then has the Jew?' he answers *Much in every way.* Israel had been chosen by God, and had a natural right to His favour. The Gentiles had no part in **the covenants of the Promise**, i.e. the various covenants with Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David, by which the original promise, made to the chosen race, had from time to time been renewed and amplified. In Rom. 9 : 4 the possession of these covenants is emphatically brought forward as one of the chief privileges of Israel. Excluded as they were from God's commonwealth, the Gentiles were **devoid of hope and God within the world.** In 1 Thess. 4 : 13 the heathen are also described as **those who have no hope**. There the reference is plainly to the hope of immortality, and this is doubtless the meaning here. Israel had received the promise of the Kingdom of God, and this for Paul involved eternal life in fellowship with God. No prospect of this kind had been vouchsafed to the Gentile world. As they were *without hope* they were also *without God.* It is only here in the New Testament that we meet with this latter word, which has given us our English word 'atheist.' In Greek, however, it does not have the meaning of denying the existence of God.

The charge on which Christians themselves were persecuted in the early centuries was that they were 'atheists'—since they refused to acknowledge the gods who were generally worshipped. In like manner the Jews accused the Gentiles of 'atheism,' because with all their religion they did not serve the true God. The word must in this place therefore be taken as 'ignorant of God's true nature,' and the same thought is more definitely expressed by the added words **within the world.** All the piety of the Gentiles was bounded by the material world. They had no knowledge of the God who made it and by fellowship with whom they would be raised above it. Even their so-called 'gods' were beings of the created world.

13 With the former status of the Gentiles Paul now contrasts their new one. He describes it in language borrowed from Isa. 57 : 19, and the whole passage 13–18 consists of an exposition in a Christian sense of this prophetic utterance: 'Peace, peace, to him that is far away and to him that is near, saith the Lord.' The prophecy, Paul says, has been fulfilled, since **now, within Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** As often in the epistles Paul here employs his phrase **in Christ** in a general sense, to denote knowledge of Christ, faith in him. We can feel repeatedly that Paul was hampered by the absence from his vocabulary of the word 'Christian,' which had not yet been adopted by the Church. He usually tries to express its meaning by various applications of his phrase **in Christ**; and in the present instance we might almost translate 'now that you have become Christians.' The prophet had spoken of 'those far away and those near,' with the picture in his mind of a great multitude, listening to a proclamation. Paul attaches a religious meaning to the terms. The Gentiles had been **far away** from God; they have now been **brought near—by the blood of Christ.** It has already been noted (cf. Col. 1 : 14) that this phrase as used by Paul implies nothing more than that Christ suffered death by violence. In the following verses the significance of this death is expounded in the light of the idea suggested by the prophecy which has just been quoted. By his death on the Cross Christ has won peace both for Jew and Gentile—peace with each other and with God.

14 Not only did Christ proclaim peace, as the prophet had

foretold, but **he is our peace.** In the opening of the epistle Paul indicated his great thesis that all things were to be reunited in Christ as their one centre. He now shews that the ancient antagonism of Jew and Gentile has been healed by Christ, **who has made both of us a unity and destroyed the barrier which kept us apart.** This metaphor may be a general one, but more probably it has a definite reference to the division of the Temple area at Jerusalem into two courts, the outer one for the Gentiles and the inner for the Jews. Between the courts there was a balustrade, on which notices were fixed that no Gentile must pass beyond this limit under pain of death. In 1871 one of the tablets bearing this inscription was discovered among the débris of the Temple, and is now preserved in the museum at Constantinople. Paul had good reason to remember the partition between the courts, for the troubles which had finally brought him as a prisoner to Rome had begun with the accusation that he had dared to admit Gentiles within the forbidden precincts (Acts 21 : 28). It has been argued that in writing to Gentile Christians in Asia Minor he could not have presumed on knowledge of a local regulation in Jerusalem. But the Jewish Temple was famous all over the world; the exclusive character of its worship was specially notorious, and a reference of this kind would be well understood.

It is difficult to determine the precise connexion of the 15
words that follow. According to one punctuation we have to translate: ‘having destroyed the barrier, the enmity in his flesh.’ This would imply that in the earthly life of Christ there was something that corresponded to the partition in the Temple. When he assumed flesh he took on himself all the limitations involved in man's fleshly being, among them the principle that made for antagonism. As a Jew he shared in the Jewish impulse to exclusiveness, but this, like all other fleshly limitations, was destroyed when he gave up his body to death. Such an interpretation is on the face of it artificial, and it is better to understand the sentence as in Moffatt's translation, putting **an end in his own flesh to the feud** (or enmity) **of the Law.** It is one of Paul's characteristic ideas

that Christ died to the Law and so released us from its demands. Assuming flesh and **born under the Law** (Gal. 4: 4), he became subject to the Law, and by his death destroyed the claim which it hitherto possessed. A thought of this kind seems to underlie the passage (parallel to this one) in Col. 2 : 14. The meaning is thus that the enmity or feud between Jews and Gentiles had arisen out of the Law, and by abolishing the Law in his death Christ had broken down the wall of partition.

The thought is made more explicit by the description of the Law as **a code of commands**, i.e. made up of precepts and rules. It was for this reason that it had created enmity. On those whom it governed it had imposed peculiar customs of an arbitrary nature—circumcision, observance of the Sabbath and festivals, the dietary rules. By his obedience to these the Jew marked himself off from other men ; indeed, the whole object of the legal system was to ensure that the Jew should be always kept mindful of his separation. Christ abolished this dividing Law 'in order that he might create the two in himself into one new man, making peace.' His destruction of the Law was itself negative, like the pulling down of an old building in order to clear the ground for a new and grander one. But by the death which put an end to the Law he passed into a new life, which was outside of the sphere of the Law altogether. In this life inaugurated by Christ, Jew and Gentile (**both parties**) could find themselves at one. Thus Paul speaks of Christ as performing in himself a new act of **creation.** He became the prototype of a humanity (**a new Man**) in which the old divisions were fused. Our attention is here directed to only one of those divisions—the agelong cleavage of Jew and Gentile. Elsewhere Paul shews how all the old antagonisms were likewise done away. Christ was the Adam of a new type of human beings, among whom nothing was to count but their common participation in his life (cf. Col. 3 : 11). In him as a centre the race was to be reunited.

16 He died not only that he might **make peace** among men, but that he might also reconcile **them both to God in one Body through the cross.** The **one Body** is the Church, in which

Jews and Gentiles are now united. In the previous verse, however, Paul has spoken of Christ as creating one new man **in himself.** The Church is regarded as the fulfilment on a vaster scale of what had been effected in Christ's own life. It is nothing else than his larger Incarnation. The creation of the Church as the ' body of Christ ' was **through the cross,** which had at once brought men into union with one another and into fellowship with God. There is a striking approximation in this verse to the thought of the Fourth Gospel, where the death of Christ is viewed, in one of its aspects, as the power which has brought the Church into being. The Intercessory Prayer (in John 17) is pervaded by the idea that Christ died for the Church, and prominence is given, just as in this epistle, to the unity that has now been realized. (' That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they all may be one in us.') The book of Revelation also turns on the conception that Christ died in order to create one Church ' out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation.' In the Johannine writings, however, the Cross is regarded as acting like a magnet, which attracts the elect people of God out of the great mass of humanity and brings them into a new union with one another. Paul's thought is rather, that Christ by his death has destroyed the principle which caused hostility between man and man and between man and God. The new life which Christ imparted to his followers was therefore one in which all oppositions were reconciled. This destruction of everything that meant disunion is emphasized again in the words about giving **the death-blow to that feud.** The A.V. adds ' thereby ' (i.e. by the Cross). The Greek might also be translated ' in himself,' which would repeat the idea of ver. 15, that the work which Christ accomplished for the world was the outcome and manifestation of that which had been fulfilled in his own Person. But the most natural reference of the words is to the Cross which has just been mentioned. It was like the sword by which Christ struck down the forces that had hitherto held men separate.

Paul continues his exposition of the words of Isaiah, 17

shewing in the light of them how Christ had perfected the work begun in his death. **He came with a** proclamation **of peace for those far away (that is, for you) and for those who were near.** The words would naturally suggest to our minds the actual ministry of Jesus. His birth was heralded with the song 'Peace on earth'; his teaching had for its purpose the removal of the old human discords and the revelation of God as the Father whom men could obey gladly and trustfully. It is evident, however, that Paul is not thinking of the historical life. He assumes the death as past, and now tells the sequel to it. He refers to a ministry **for** or to **you**, i.e. the Gentiles. So the Christ of whom he speaks is the exalted Lord, who is occupied in his great work of uniting in one Church those who were previously separate. In the quotation from Isaiah a word is used which is meant to suggest the Christian mission, and which Moffatt aptly translates **he came with a gospel of peace.** It is implied that in the missionaries who are now working among Jews and Gentiles alike Christ himself is present, offering his **gospel of peace** to all men. That it does indeed bring peace is
18 proved by this—that **through him we both enjoy** (have) **our access to the Father in one Spirit.**

The language here suggests the epistle to the Hebrews, where Christ is represented as the great high-priest through whom we have access to God. In Hebrews, however, everything turns on the priestly ideal. Christ has offered the perfect sacrifice, in virtue of which he has entered the true sanctuary in heaven, as the high-priest went into the holy of holies on the day of Atonement. As the people were supposed to stand before God in the person of the high-priest, so in Christ we have a communion with God which is of no mere ritual nature and which endures for ever. In the present passage there is no suggestion of these priestly and sacrificial ideas. **Through him** means simply, because of the victory which he won, the knowledge of God which he imparted. God is called emphatically **the Father,** implying that the effect of Christ's work has been to break down the old distrust of God and enable all men to draw near to

Him as to the common Father. It is doubtful whether the words **in one Spirit** are meant to refer to the holy Spirit. So to interpret them would certainly be in keeping with Paul's conception of the Spirit as the uniting principle in the Church (cf. 1 Cor. 12 : 4 f.). But he is here speaking not of the means by which we make our approach, but of the new attitude of worship which is now possible for all men. The force of the words is better brought out if we understand them in the sense 'in one frame of mind,' 'with one heart and soul.' As the Church is 'one body' so there is one pervading will that controls it.

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH (2 : 19–22)

Thus you are strangers and foreigners no longer, you share the membership of the saints, you belong to God's own household, you are a building that rests on the apostles and prophets as its foundation, with Christ Jesus as the corner-stone ; in him the whole structure is welded together and rises into a sacred temple in the Lord, and in him you are yourselves built into this to form a habitation for God in the Spirit. 19 20 21 22

In this closing section of the chapter the thoughts which Paul has been expounding are all summed up and brought to a head. In its main idea and imagery the passage is similar to several which have been examined in the previous epistle (Col. 2 : 7, 19). Paul was there arguing, however, against the attempt of the heretics to reduce Christ to a secondary place instead of making him the very centre. Here our attention is fixed on the unity of the Church which owes its existence to Christ.

19 Paul reverts, in the first place, to the idea of ver. 12—that the Church is a commonwealth in which all have the rank of free citizens. **Thus you are strangers and foreigners no longer.** Again using the technical terms for inferior status in a Greek city he assures his readers that they are in the fullest sense fellow-citizens with (sharing **the membership of**) **the saints.** The name which is generally applied in the New Testament

to all members of the Church seems here to denote those Jewish Christians who claimed, in right of their descent, to be God's people *par excellence.* Or perhaps (as in 1 : 18) the word **saints** should be rendered 'the holy ones,' i.e. the heavenly company. Hitherto the Gentiles have been denied all privileges even on earth ; now they have been admitted to equality with angels (cf. Heb. 12 : 23). This may be in Paul's mind when he says that they have become not merely fellow-citizens but members of **God's own household.** As the people of Christ they belong to the inner circle, like those servants of a king who form his immediate retinue.

20 It may be this mention of a house which suggests the closing comparison. The people of Christ are not only **God's own household,** but the house in which He dwells. To our minds the transition from a commonwealth to a building may seem abrupt and somewhat incongruous, but we must remember the significance which in ancient times attached to a temple. It was not a place for worship, like a modern church or cathedral, but was the actual dwelling-place of the divinity. The real worship was conducted in the space outside of the temple, and usually in the open air, while the temple was reserved for the god himself and for the priests who were supposed to minister to his desires. The teachers of Israel had broken through this primitive conception, and were aware of a God 'who dwelleth not in temples made with hands' ; and this more spiritual view was accepted from the first in Christianity. It finds its supreme expression in the declaration of John 4 : 21 f. : 'The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem worship the Father : God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.' Thus the belief that God dwelt in a visible earthly house gave place to another—that His true servants constituted His temple. Paul especially, in a number of passages, declares that God has His abode in the Church—in the society of men and women who have entered into fellowship with Him. **We are the temple of the living God** (2 Cor. 6 : 16). This idea of the Church as the house in which God dwells meets us constantly

in early Christian literature, and is occasionally worked out in detail, as in the present passage. It seemed, moreover, to have a special fitness in view of Old Testament references which were universally accepted as messianic ; e.g., ‘ the stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner ’ ; ‘ behold, I lay in Zion a sure foundation-stone.’ Such texts appeared to point clearly to Christ himself as the beginning of a new spiritual temple.

Paul speaks of his Gentile readers, then, as built on the foundation of **the apostles and prophets.** They were like so many chosen stones which were to support the glorious **building** wherein God Himself would dwell. Elsewhere (1 Cor. 3 : 10) Paul describes the apostles as the chief builders of the new temple—responsible to God for the faithfulness with which they perform their work. Here he thinks of them as the foundation on which the structure **rests**, and couples them, as the original elements in the life of the Church, with the **prophets.** This has often been taken to refer to the Old Testament prophets, on whose teaching and predictions the faith of the Church was so largely based. But the prophets who lived centuries before the apostles would not be mentioned after them ; neither could they be represented as an integral part of the Christian community. The reference is doubtless to the Christian prophets of whose activities we hear so much in the book of Acts and the epistles. Their ‘ spiritual gift ’ is ranked by Paul as next to that of the apostles (1 Cor. 12 : 28 ; Eph. 4 : 11), and seems to have consisted in lofty eloquence, dealing with the mysteries of the future and of the unseen world. The author of our book of Revelation explicitly designates himself as one of the prophets (Rev. 22 : 9).

It has often been remarked that the conspicuous place here given to the apostles and prophets is hard to reconcile with the Pauline authorship of the epistle. The writer speaks reverently of the apostles as great servants of God, whom the Church honoured as its founders. How could Paul have adopted this attitude towards a group of men of whom he himself was one ? This argument, however, has little weight. The writer is not eulogizing the apostles, but is simply stating an historical fact. **The apostles and prophets** were indeed the basis of the Church—the teachers who had taken the chief part in building up the community. A modern missionary might speak of himself and his colleagues as the pioneering workers, and no one would accuse him of self-exaltation.

But while Paul claims their due for the apostles and prophets, he is careful to add that **Christ Jesus** himself is **the chief corner-stone.** This word, suggested by Isa. 28 : 16, applies literally to an ornamental stone, set in the corner of a building, and inscribed with the name of the king or benefactor who built it. It is clear, however, that Paul means to denote the foundation on which the whole building rests. But metaphors are always inadequate, and as he reflects on Christ's relation to the Church, he sees that only one aspect of it can be expressed under the image of a foundation. Christ is not only the beginning of the Church but continues to be the power that holds it together and shapes it and ensures its growth towards
21 completeness. The metaphor is therefore modified to allow room for these further conceptions. '**In him** all that is built, being fitted or **welded together, rises** (keeps rising) **into a sacred temple in the Lord.**' The Greek word must be translated ' all that is building ' or ' every building ' (not **the whole structure** or ' all the building '). Some would explain this curious turn of phrase as implying a reference to the various Christian communities. Not only the Church as a whole but each separate group of believers is to consider itself a house of God, fashioned by Christ. The context, however, plainly shews that Paul is still thinking of the whole Church, so that we must take the word in an abstract sense, difficult to reproduce in English ; ' all that is built or building ' means everything that is added after the foundation is laid.

It is to be noted that Paul pictures the Church not as a finished structure but as one in process of erection. The apostles and prophets form the ground-work, new tiers of stones are constantly rising on this foundation, and all is being built in accordance with a given design which is growing ever nearer to completion. It is the power of Christ which orders the harmonious progress of the building, and the work is therefore described as being accomplished **in him.** He is not merely the foundation but, so to speak, the frame in which everything is contained. So Paul passes to the idea which underlies the whole elaborate simile. He conceives of the Church not only as a building, with its necessary basis and super-structure, but as a unique kind of building. By every addition that is made it keeps growing **into a sacred** (or holy) **temple in the Lord.** In order that He may dwell among men God requires the community of His people, which is henceforth to replace all the old temples made with hands. The living God can only manifest His presence in a living house. Under a different image the verse gives vivid expression to the thought which pervades the epistle—that the Church is the larger Incarnation of Christ. It is **a temple in the Lord**—a body of Christ corresponding to the body which he wore on earth.

So Paul returns to the thought which has led him into this 22
whole description of the Church as a building, founded in Christ and moulded by him in all its growth. **In him you are yourselves** being **built** (together with the Jews) **to form** (or, for) **a habitation** (dwelling-place) **for God in the Spirit.** The Gentiles, who were formerly outcast, have now their place in the structure which God has planned. The purpose for which He designed it is emphatically stated. He meant it for his own **habitation,** and the Gentiles are now part of the holy community in which God manifests His presence with men. The words **in the Spirit**—reserved for the significant place at the end—might best be rendered by an adjective. This new house of God is not one of stone and lime but a spiritual temple. The author of 1 Peter plainly understands the phrase in this sense when he describes the Church in language which is evidently borrowed from the present passage. **You also as living stones are built into a spiritual house** (1 Pet. 2 : 5). Perhaps the thought goes back to the mysterious saying of Jesus, which was the chief evidence brought against him at his trial : 'Destroy this temple and I will build it again in three days.' We only know this

saying as reported by his enemies and torn from its context, but it seems to reflect the same thought to which Paul here gives utterance. Jesus declared that the old order, under which the presence of God was associated with a visible house and an outward ritual, is now to come to an end. God is to manifest Himself through living men and women, devoted to His service. The temple might perish, but it would be replaced immediately by a new house, more fitted to be the dwelling-place of God.

THE MESSAGE ENTRUSTED TO PAUL AS THE APOSTLE OF THE GENTILES (3 : 1–13)

iii.
1 For this reason I Paul, I whom Jesus has made a prisoner
2 for the sake of you Gentiles—for surely you have heard
how the grace of God which was vouchsafed me in your
3 interests has ordered it, how the divine secret was dis-
closed to me by a revelation (if you read what I have
4 already written briefly about this, you can understand
5 my insight into that secret of Christ which was not dis-
closed to the sons of men in other generations as it has
now been revealed to his sacred apostles and prophets by
6 the Spirit), namely, that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are
co-heirs, companions, and co-partners in the Promise.
7 Such is the gospel which I was called to serve by the
endowment of God's grace which was vouchsafed me, by
8 the energy of his power ; less than the least of all saints
as I am, this grace was vouchsafed me, that I should
bring the Gentiles the gospel of the fathomless wealth of
9 Christ and enlighten all men upon the new order of that
divine secret which God the Creator of all concealed
10 from eternity—intending to let the full sweep of the
divine wisdom be disclosed now by the church to the
angelic Rulers and Authorities in the heavenly sphere,
11 in terms of the eternal purpose which he has realized
12 in Christ Jesus our Lord, through whom, as we have
faith in him, we enjoy our confidence of free access.

So I beg of you not to lose heart over what I am suffering on your behalf ; my sufferings are an honour to you. 13

Paul is about to resume his prayer on behalf of his readers that they may have deeper insight into the meaning and inner purpose of their faith. This prayer forms the framework of the whole first half of the epistle. It begins with the thanksgiving after the opening salutation (1 : 3) and only closes with the benediction in 3 : 20, 21. Throughout this long section he never loses the consciousness that he is offering a prayer ; his thought is pitched in a solemn key, and his language assumes a character which is different from that of ordinary speech.

To this liturgical strain in the epistle we may attribute most of those peculiarities which distinguish it from Paul's other writings and have caused many scholars to assign it to a different hand. But while the prayer runs through the three chapters it is broken by a number of parentheses in which the ideas involved in it are more fully developed. An exposition of the nature of the gospel is thus interwoven with the prayer—distinct from it and yet springing out of it and merging in it again without effort. The passage before us is one of those parentheses. As he speaks of the gospel Paul is led to reflect on his own right to teach it. He is writing as if he had light to throw on its profounder issues, and cannot but feel that his readers may question his credentials, especially as he had once been bitterly opposed to this gospel which he now commends to others. He therefore pauses in his prayer to tell of the revelation which had changed him into a new man ; from this he goes on to speak of the nature of the revelation. It had carried with it a special insight into the hidden purpose of the gospel, and it is this deeper knowledge which he is now seeking to communicate. The personal digression thus brings him back to his main theme, and at that point he again resumes his prayer.

For this reason I Paul. The sentence which thus begins 1 is left unfinished, and is only taken up again at ver. 14. When he started it, Paul meant to continue ' make my prayer for you,' but the thought comes to him that he must justify his right to this office. He has partly done so in the words with which he opens, calling himself—as he does several times in these epistles—the **prisoner** of Jesus. His sufferings, if nothing else, have clothed him with authority. The phrase by which he describes himself does not mean merely that he is a prisoner in Christ's cause. It suggests that he has been thrown into bonds not by his enemies but by Christ himself: **whom Jesus has made a prisoner.** For some great purpose of his own Christ has made his apostle a prisoner, and this hardship has been imposed on him **for the sake of you Gentiles.** The immediate meaning is that it is his zeal for the cause of the Gentiles that has brought about his arrest and imprisonment. This was literally true. If Paul had confined himself to work among his own countrymen, he would no doubt have suffered many discomforts and been cast out from the synagogue, but he would never have been sent to Rome to stand trial for his life. The reason why the Roman authorities had meddled with him was that he had not confined his wild and disturbing ideas to his own countrymen. But besides this literal meaning the words imply that his imprisonment was in some way a sacrifice **on behalf of the Gentile** world. This, indeed, was why Christ had **made him a prisoner.** Christ himself had given his life for the world, and his servant must likewise suffer for the redemption of the Gentiles.

2 After mentioning his own name, then, Paul thinks of the suggestions which it will have for his readers; **for surely you have heard,** he writes, of the special task allotted to me by the **grace of God.** Again he speaks of himself as known only by reputation. We have here one of the decisive proofs that he is writing to some other church than Ephesus, where his three years' residence had made him a familiar figure. In speaking of the report which has gone abroad concerning him, he repeats the puzzling word which is characteristic of this epistle—the 'distribution' or 'economy' of the grace of God: **how the grace of God has ordered it,** or allotted me a special task. Here it is to be understood in something like its original meaning of the management or

ordering of a house. Just as a master apportions a different task to each of his servants, so God is conceived as distributing His grace in such a manner as to qualify all His messengers for their several duties. The best explanation of the passage is to be found in Paul's own account of the 'spiritual gifts' in 1 Cor. 12. He there describes how the Spirit has been imparted to all the members of the Church, and how each of them has received a separate gift (*charisma*). Some of these endowments were striking and important, others apparently humble; but all of them came through the same Spirit, and were equally necessary to the welfare of the Church. His own particular gift was that of evangelizing the Gentiles, and he describes it here as 'the allotment of the grace of God on your behalf,' or **in your interests.**

3 For this service of the Gentiles he had been peculiarly fitted, for the **divine secret** (or mystery) **was disclosed to me by a revelation.** What the mystery was he is presently to state, but he first alludes to it by this solemn term in order to impress on his readers that it was something hidden in the counsels of God—part of His **secret** plan for the world's salvation. It was not to be discovered therefore by human wisdom. A disclosure from above was necessary, and this had been made to Paul. Perhaps he refers to his experience at the moment of his conversion. According to the account in Acts an intimation was then conveyed to him that he was destined to carry the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 26 : 17 f.). As he looked back on his conversion he no doubt felt that his future task was implicitly given him in that decisive experience. A vision of Christ had been granted him which bestowed on him in a single flash all that he was henceforth to be and know. But the reference is not necessarily to that particular vision. As he tells us himself, he was subject to trances in which he was conscious of receiving mysterious intimations. He believed, too, that he possessed the Spirit, which knew 'the deep things of God,' and imparted to him that higher wisdom. The **revelation** of which he is now speaking may have come to him in any of these ways.

4 A sentence is thrown in to support his claim to a knowledge

that could only have come through revelation. It is difficult to say whether this bracketed sentence should extend to ver. 5 (as in Moffatt), or only cover ver. 3 (as in the A.V.). Probably there is no clear-cut division. It is one of the characteristics of Paul's style (and this is especially notable in Ephesians) that he breaks his train of argument with incidental reflections which are then taken up into the passage as a whole. So after mentioning the mystery which had been revealed to him he interjects 'As I wrote a brief statement before, in the light of which, as you read it, you can judge of my understanding in the mystery of Christ.' Some have supposed that Paul is here alluding to some previous letter (perhaps Colossians) in which he had dealt with the deeper implications of the gospel. Much more likely he refers to earlier passages in this same epistle, especially to the account of the mystery of God in 1 : 9, 10. He is confident that after pondering such statements his readers will acknowledge that he speaks with an authentic voice. The man who could so penetrate into the hidden purposes of God must be guided by a light which was not that of human wisdom.

There might seem at first sight to be a touch of presumption in his thus drawing attention to the depth and significance of his own thoughts. It has been suggested that when he speaks of ' reading ' he means the study of the Old Testament, and says in effect, ' as you examine the prophecies and compare them with my teaching, you will perceive that I have grasped their true import.' But he clearly refers to what he himself has written, and no great effort is needed to vindicate his character for modesty. There is nothing arrogant in his claim that the two preceding chapters have proved his insight into the gospel. We recognize now that no profounder exposition of it has ever been offered, and the apostle must have been conscious as he wrote them of a glow of inspiration. When Byron sent off the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, he could not help noting on the margin of one series of stanzas, ' This is the real thing.' When Thackeray read over *Vanity Fair*, he exclaimed at one passage, ' This is genius.' Paul was no more guilty of self-admiration than those other great writers who knew when they had done supremely well. It must be remembered, too, that he wishes to assert not his possession of genius but his endowment with the Spirit. He believed that his teaching was of value only in so far as he was guided by the higher light, and he is anxious to make clear that such a light had been vouchsafed to him. By what he has **written already** they will know that his mind has been illuminated, so that he has an undoubted right to instruct them.

He speaks, then, of his 'understanding in the mystery of Christ.' Presently he is to define the mystery as the calling of the Gentiles, but this is only one significant phase of a greater plan which has hitherto been hidden in the mind of God. It is this mystery of the reunion of all things in Christ that he thinks of here, and he bids his readers look back and ponder what he has already said. The divine secret or 5 mystery **was not disclosed to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his sacred** (holy) **apostles and prophets by the Spirit.** In the parallel passage of Colossians (1 : 26) Paul tells of a disclosure made to the **saints,** and it has been held that here also we should translate 'to the saints, apostles, and prophets.' But almost certainly the word for **sacred** or 'holy' is to be taken as an adjective, qualifying the two nouns.

One of the arguments against the authenticity of the epistle has been based on this reference to the holy apostles. Would Paul himself have applied this term of veneration to the group of which he was one ? But the difficulty is mainly due to the connotation which the adjective now has for us. In the New Testament it does not bear a moral sense, but is used of anything that is consecrated to the service of God. All Christians were 'holy,' and when he speaks of himself as a Christian Paul lays claim, without any hesitation, to the usual title (cf. ver. 8). Why should he not do so when he describes himself not only as a Christian but as an apostle ? The word is necessary, too, to bring out the idea which he is here enforcing. He insists on a meaning in the gospel, a 'mystery' which is not perceived by the ordinary man. For the full discernment of it one must have a special gift which is only possessed by God's chosen servants—apostles and prophets. This is made explicit in the added words **by the Spirit**, which mark out the apostles and prophets as the chief vehicles of revelation.

6 Paul now arrives at that statement of the mystery to which he has been leading up. It consists in this—**that the Gentiles are co-heirs, companions** (or, co-members), **and co-partners in the Promise in Christ Jesus** through the gospel. In order to give it a solemn emphasis the same idea is thrice repeated in words which are practically equivalent. The Gentiles are not to be regarded as in any way on an inferior footing to the Jews; they have privileges identically the same. The middle term means literally 'integral parts of the body,' and suggests a union which is not accidental or fictitious, but belongs to the very essence of the thing. This thing of which the Gentiles are so completely partakers is the promised salvation, which has now been realized in Christ and is offered through the gospel. Paul is so much impressed with the significance of the Gentile mission that he thinks of it as bound up with the ultimate counsels of God. To understand the value he attaches to it we must bear in mind the great idea which dominates the epistle. The purpose of Christ was to reconcile a universe at war with itself, and reunite all things in himself. Compared with this infinite scope of the work of Christ the admission of the Gentiles into the Church might appear a very trivial matter; but the germ of everything was there. By doing away with the old opposition of Jew and Gentile Christ had begun the work of reconciliation; he had established a centre from which it could extend and fulfil itself. If men could only apprehend all that was involved in the fusion of two opposing elements in the Christian church, they would have a key to the whole eternal purpose of God.

7 The mention of the gospel brings Paul back to that assertion of his personal claim which he had begun in ver. 2: **the gospel which I was called to serve** (of which I became a minister) **by the endowment of God's grace which was vouch-**

safed me. As before, he lays stress on the special *charisma* which had been bestowed on him. He was well aware that his peculiar gift was to awaken faith in the Christian message (cf. 1 Cor. 1 : 17 : **Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel**). This gift was **vouchsafed him by the energy** (according to the operation) **of his power.** These added words may (as in the translation) simply emphasize the previous thought that he had received a divine commission, and that his success as an apostle was due to a power directly given him from above. But more probably they define and qualify what has gone before. He has elsewhere described how the grace of God is bestowed on men in varying degrees (cf. Rom. 12 : 6), and he is here careful to claim for himself no more than his allotted share. **I serve the gospel,** he says, 'in proportion to the working of his power.' Others may have received of the Spirit more largely and render higher service to the cause ; all that could be asked of him was to exercise faithfully the measure of power which had been granted him.

If any proof were needed that Paul has not spoken of him- 8
self in any spirit of vain-glory we find it in the language that follows ; the word in which he describes his unworthiness is a double superlative, well translated **less than the least.** He is **less than the least of all saints.** Paul refers to himself in similar terms in 1 Cor. 15 : 9, at the same time explaining why he felt thus humble : **For I am the very least of the apostles, who am unfit to be called an apostle, since I persecuted the church of God.** In view of that dark episode in his past, which he could never forget, his humility was certainly much more than a pious pose. At the same time his object here is not so much to depreciate himself as to prove that the gift which had done such wonders through one so unworthy must be from God. The thought is similar to that in 2 Cor. 4 : 7 : 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.'

The **grace** or spiritual gift bestowed on him had been to proclaim to the Gentiles what (in the A.V.) is called ' the

unsearchable riches of Christ.' In Rom. 11 : 33 the same expressive adjective is used of the judgments of God—the strange, incalculable ways in which He brings His will to pass. It means literally 'not to be traced out,' and suggests the idea of a forest or labyrinth in which one may wander without end. The meaning is here that **the wealth of Christ,** i.e. the truth contained in **the gospel,** is so infinitely deep and **fathomless** and manifold that the more we ponder it the more we
9 grow bewildered. Paul's mission had been to proclaim this truth and to **enlighten all men.** It may be that Paul uses this word in the special sense of illumination which it had come to acquire in the religious language of the time, that is, of divulging a secret doctrine (cf. 1 : 18). More likely it is suggested by the imagery of the previous verse. The divine counsel is like a trackless labyrinth, but Paul has lighted up **the new order** or ordering of the mystery as with a lantern.

He again employs the word which denotes literally the management of a house, and the meaning which he here attaches to it is that of wise direction. From the beginning God had a purpose, known only to Himself, which He was seeking to realize. In view of this purpose He had ordered the whole course of the world's history, working often in a manner that to man's mind is unintelligible. In the latter part of Rom. 11 Paul tries to shew that even in His permission of evil God's ultimate aim, which had never been lost sight of, was to manifest His love in Christ. To throw light, then, on the divine purpose and the mysterious ways by which it had been moving towards fulfilment, had been the task with which Paul was entrusted. He emphasizes once more the secret nature of the purpose. It had been hidden or **concealed from** 'the ages' (so the word literally means), i.e. perhaps from those angelic beings who ruled in the heavenly world ; but more probably it means **from eternity,** conceived as an endless succession of ages. It had been hidden in God (so A.V.), i.e. in that inner mind of His which none could penetrate, and in this connexion He is significantly called **the Creator of all.** The suggestion is that behind all His work of creation lay this secret purpose. All things had been made and had been governed from the beginning with the one design of realizing that hidden plan of God.

The mystery so long hidden has now been declared, 'in 10 order that now may be made known through the church to the powers and the governments in the invisible world the manifold wisdom of God.' Paul has spoken of his own commission to proclaim the gospel to the world and so to bring into existence that Church designed by God in which Jews and Gentiles would alike share in Christ's salvation. But this work of his had been subordinate to an infinitely greater work. From the Church which he was helping to build up a movement was to proceed which would finally affect the whole universe. Thus he thinks of a revelation made through the Church **to the angelic Rulers** or powers. This may simply be another way of saying that even the highest angels had hitherto been ignorant of God's purpose, and were now learning it for the first time as they watched the progress of the Church. But there is probably a more definite idea, which is to be understood in the light of 1 Cor. 2 : 6–8. Paul there tells of a hidden wisdom which he reserved for his maturer converts. It seems to have consisted in some kind of apocalyptic scheme which served as a background for his explanation of the gospel message. According to this speculative construction, so far as we can guess its nature, the hostile powers had sought to frustrate the work of God, and believed they had succeeded when they conspired against Christ and brought about his Crucifixion. But unwittingly they had been mere instruments in God's hands. The death of Christ had been the very means He had devised for the accomplishment of His plan.

So it is here declared that the hostile powers, after their brief apparent triumph, had now become aware of a **divine wisdom** they had never dreamed of. They saw the Church arising as the result of Christ's death, and giving effect to what they could now perceive to have been the hidden purpose of God. Paul has already defined that purpose : to reunite all things in Christ. All the warring elements in the universe were to find their centre in Christ, and thus to be brought again into harmony. It was the powers **in the heavenly sphere** that had maintained strife and division, and now they realized that they were overcome. They knew that God had willed to restore a universal peace by Christ, and that through the Church His plan was already on the way to fulfilment. This, then, was **the wisdom** of God which was being **disclosed** to them. It is called ' manifold ' in the A.V. or more literally ' many coloured.' The idea suggested is that of endless diversity—a web made up of innumerable threads which no one can ever hope to unravel.

11 The thought is again repeated that all this happened **in terms of** (or, according to) **the purpose** of the ages **which he has realized** (better, formed) **in Christ Jesus our Lord.** It is only now that the purpose is drawing to fulfilment, but God has been always working on it. This is implied in ' a purpose of the ages '—not so much an **eternal purpose** as one that has run like a guiding motive through all the successive phases of the world's life. God had formed it **in Christ.** Just as He made all things in Christ (Col. 1 : 15 f.), so He had framed the purpose which was to guide Him in His government of all things. Here again we are reminded of Philo's image of the architect who creates the plan in his mind before he begins to realize it in visible form.

12 From a survey which has taken in all time and existence Paul now returns to what Christ has done for himself and those to whom he is writing. This personal note comes with peculiar force after the lofty conceptions which have just been impressed on our minds. Since Christ has this infinite significance we may rely on him with absolute trust. He is **our Lord** in whom we have boldness and **access** to God in **confidence** through **faith in him.** It needs to be noted that this is the motive underlying all the far-reaching speculation of the epistle. As he tries to fathom the plan of God and determine Christ's relation to the universe, Paul may seem to lose sight of practical religious interests.

The epistle has sometimes been viewed as the forerunner of that later Gnostic literature in which all the stress was laid on secret revelations, and the Christian message was merged in a wild mythology intended to explain the creation of the world and the origin of evil. It may be admitted that Paul here gives a wider range to pure speculation than in his other writings. It may be admitted, too, that much of his speculation is abstract and fantastic. He connects the Christian redemption with a cosmical theory and a doctrine of supernatural agencies. His philosophy has many points of contact with the mythological constructions of the Gnostic thinkers. But between him and them there is this essential difference, that his mind is always fixed on the actual work achieved by Christ. The aim of his speculations is to secure an adequate background to the message of the Cross. Convinced that it has an absolute value, he tries to fit it into the scheme of the universe, into the ultimate plan of God. And however widely he allows his imagination to range he is always intent on a practical religious purpose—to strengthen the faith of his readers by making them realize, in some measure, the infinite scope of the gospel. From this point of view his speculations, whatever our modern thought may make of them, have a permanent value. They serve to remind us that the message of Christ was not one of the many attempts to discover the way of life. It was rooted in the divine purpose. We can feel that in accepting it we have laid hold of the final reality.

Paul had begun by speaking of himself and his sufferings, 13
and now, at the close of the long parenthesis, he again strikes this personal note. So then, i.e. because we can have this absolute confidence in Christ, I pray you **not to lose heart over what I am suffering on your behalf**; all this is your glory. In some MSS. the **you** is omitted, and the verse thus becomes a prayer of Paul for himself: 'I pray that I may not be discouraged.' The other reading, however, is not only the best supported, but fits in most suitably with the context. Paul is thinking of his own hardships only as they may affect his readers. May they not waver in their faith when they reflect that its chief apostle is in prison, seemingly abandoned by the God he trusted in? No; they are to consider that he is suffering for their sakes, and that out of his sacrifice

God will bring some great blessing for the Church. We can gather from many allusions in these epistles that this was the conviction which enabled Paul to bear up cheerfully through his long imprisonment. He was *the prisoner of Christ*; Jews and Romans were only the instruments of Christ, who had imposed this captivity on his servant for a purpose of his own. This purpose could be nothing else than that of helping forward the work among the Gentiles for which he had been divinely chosen. As he had carried it on by his active missionary labours, so he was now, in some way that he could not trace, fulfilling it in prison. His churches would find in the end that all this had been their glory, an honour to them.

PRAYER THAT HIS READERS MAY ATTAIN TO PERFECT FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE (3 : 14–19)

14 For this reason, then, I kneel before the Father, from whom
15 every family in heaven and on earth derives its name and
16 nature, praying him out of the wealth of his glory to
grant you a mighty increase of strength by his Spirit in
17 the inner man. May Christ dwell in your hearts as you
18 have faith ! May you be so fixed and founded in love
that you can grasp with all the saints what is the meaning
of ‘ the Breadth,’ ‘ the Length,’ ‘ the Depth,’ and ‘ the
19 Height,’ by knowing the love of Christ which surpasses
all knowledge ! May you be filled with the entire fulness
of God !

At the beginning of the chapter Paul had set himself to offer prayer on behalf of his readers. He had broken off in order to justify his right to represent them, and this had led him into a further digression on the nature of the gospel which he had taught. Now he resumes the interrupted prayer, which comes with greater power since we have learned about the man who offers it and the significance of his message. He prays that they may believe this message with their whole heart and obtain an ever deeper insight into it, although its full meaning will always be inexhaustible.

For this reason I kneel (bend my knees) **before** (to) **the** 14 15
Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. The general sense of this opening of the prayer is clear. Jesus had been accustomed to pray to God as **Father**, and the prayer he taught his disciples had begun with this name. It was the practice of the early church to begin all prayer with this form of address which had been sanctioned by Jesus himself, and Paul indicates here that when he prays for his converts he uses this consecrated form. But he pauses for a moment to note what is implied in the name **Father.** It means that God is the universal Father, and that the common relation to Him is the bond of union between all other beings. All ties run back to this ultimate one, and have no meaning or validity apart from it. But the exact interpretation of Paul's language is open to much dispute. His meaning is the more difficult to grasp, as he uses a play on words which cannot be reproduced in English. 'God is the Father, from whom all fatherhood is named.' Some would explain the word, rendered thus literally, in its abstract sense. The primary relation is that of fatherhood, and whenever the name **Father** is spoken it implies a reference to our relation to God. Paul would thus say that God's name of **Father** is no mere metaphor, taken over from the human relation, but that, on the contrary, the only real 'fatherhood' is that of God; all other uses of the name are reflections of this primary one.

It is in this manner that the passage is usually explained in modern commentaries, but the idea with which Paul is thus credited is strange and hardly intelligible. One cannot but ask, too, how he conceived of other **Fathers** besides God Himself existing **in heaven.** The disputed word can be more naturally understood when we take it in the concrete sense (equally sanctioned by Greek usage) of 'tribe' or **family.** Our A.V. translates 'all the family,' but the idea thus suggested, though beautiful in itself, is not to be found in the original. The grammar will admit of no other rendering than **every family.** Paul thinks of the inhabitants of heaven and earth as divided into countless races and groups, but all of them acknowledge God as their **Father,** and by this common relation to Him are bound together. This is expressed by saying that they are named **from** Him. Just as the tribes of Israel, the clans of Greece or Asia Minor, each went by the name of its supposed ancestor, so all races, heavenly and earthly, are conceived as calling themselves by the name of God.

16 The prayer proceeds: that he may **grant you,** according to the riches **of his glory,** to be strengthened mightily through **his Spirit in the inner man.** Paul has addressed God as the universal Father, and prays that his readers may receive a blessing which will correspond with that name. The **glory** of God is His divine character, and the word is here used to express the power and goodness which belong to His Fatherhood. As a Father, who possesses those attributes in infinite measure, He is to strengthen His children **in the inner man.**

The phrase is one that meets us frequently in Paul's writings, and it has to be understood in the light of his psychology. He conceives of human nature as composed of two elements: (*a*) the flesh, which includes not merely the body, but all the impulses and activities which are bound up with the earthly life; (*b*) **the inner man,** or 'mind.' Here the true personality resides. It is on this side of his nature that man is allied to God, and though it is entangled in the flesh and constantly thwarted and overborne, the 'mind' continues to seek for God and desires to do His will (cf. the wonderfully vivid account of the conflict in man's nature in Rom. 7). Through faith in Christ a third element enters in. The mind or **inner man** (the true self) is powerless through the flesh, but the Spirit lays hold of it and helps it to fulfil those desires which have hitherto been frustrated. Man now recovers his freedom, and becomes capable of that higher life to which he was destined. Paul therefore prays that the Spirit may exert all its power **in the inner man** of his readers. He is thinking particularly, as the sequel shews, of the enlightenment which the Spirit brings, and which is necessary for the knowledge of the divine purposes; but he describes this illumination as **a mighty increase of strength.** He means, no doubt, to suggest that the true knowledge of God involves **a mighty** effort, to which the unaided faculties of man are unequal. The mind must be raised and supported by God's own Spirit.

This prayer, that their inward life may be transformed 17 and strengthened, is now repeated in another form: that **Christ** may **dwell in** their **hearts** through faith. It is often difficult in Paul's thought to distinguish between the Spirit and the indwelling Christ. Probably he himself was not conscious of any clear distinction. For earlier Christian belief Christ was the Lord enthroned in heaven, and Paul also conceives of him in this manner. But with his mystical turn of mind he also thinks of him as an inward, abiding presence, and his conception of Christ thus tends to fuse itself with that of the Spirit. In the present passage he moves from the one idea to the other without any effort to keep them apart. The union with Christ which is at the same time possession of the Spirit is effected by faith. In Gal. 2 : 20 it is likewise implied that faith in Christ has its outcome in a mystical union. There is some doubt as to whether the words **in love** should be included in ver. 17 or in ver. 18. Westcott and Hort adopt the punctuation 'that Christ through faith should dwell in your hearts in love,' and several modern commentators have argued that this is necessary to bring out the true meaning of the sentence; the union with Christ which results from faith in him is to find its manifestation in the love of Christians for one another. But the more natural connexion of the words is with the next clause. They supply the key to it, and are therefore placed emphatically at the beginning: **in love** (so rooted, or) 18 **fixed and founded, that you can grasp** (may have full strength to apprehend) along **with all the saints.**

In all his Greek churches Paul had to contend with an undue exaltation of knowledge for its own sake. The Greek converts were keenly interested in the Christian teaching on its intellectual side. They recognized that here was a message which opened up new vistas of speculation, which threw light on the final problems in a way that the old philosophies had failed to do. But they could not be brought to understand that Christian thinking must be conditioned by the Christian will and disposition. This is the truth which Paul is trying to enforce all through his first epistle to the Corinthians. He has nothing but praise of the Corinthians for their interest in theology, their ' zeal for knowledge.' If Christianity were only a matter of knowing they would have little need for a teacher. But he seeks to shew them, as he deals with one great question after another, that love is more than knowledge, and that true knowledge is unattainable without love. In like manner he insists here that the knowledge of God must be grounded in love. His thought is similar to that in the first epistle of John (4 : 7, 8) : ' Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God ; he that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love,' Thus a special significance attaches to the phrase **with all the saints.**

Often, when this familiar passage is quoted, the phrase is omitted altogether as unimportant, but the whole thought may be said to depend on it. One result of the value placed on knowledge in the Greek churches had been to foster arrogance and aloofness. Already in Paul's later days there were small exclusive groups of the more intellectual converts who preferred to worship by themselves and assumed the title of ' spiritual men.' After Paul's death this separation of some members from the main body of Christians became a serious evil (cf. 1 John 2 : 19, Heb. 10 : 25), and was one of the accompaniments of the Gnostic heresy. Paul here implies that the spirit which leads to a fancied superiority on the part of a few is fatal to true knowledge. The more men are united in fellowship with their brethren the more they enter into fellowship with God. To know the truth in its fulness they must be able to feel themselves at one **with all the saints.** It is also suggested (as in ver. 16) that this knowledge requires the utmost effort of which the soul is capable. Our own wisdom, however great, must be supported by a higher power in order that we may have strength to apprehend 'what is the breadth and length and height and depth' (so A.V.).

Much unnecessary difficulty has been made about these terms. According to an old interpretation Paul is thinking of the heavenly temple. He conceives of the believer as caught up in an ecstasy and seeking to measure the dwelling-place of God in all its dimensions. Some modern scholars (as in our translation) have tried to make out that Paul is quoting the technical terms of Hellenistic mysticism or magic. Parallels are adduced from obscure religious documents of the period, in which the effort is made to conceive of the divine essence under geometrical figures. On the strength of this passage about 'breadth and length' the epistle is supposed to draw its inspiration from some esoteric school of thought which flourished towards the end of the first century. But there is surely no need to postulate any out-of-the-way source for these very common words. Paul is seeking to express the idea of something infinitely great, and naturally falls back on terms of measurement. It is objected that he leaves the terms hanging in the air, without telling us what is so long and broad and high; but he leaves this to be inferred from what follows. Apparently he meant at first to complete the clause and speak of the 'depth and height of the love of Christ,' and if he had done this no one would have suspected any difficulty. But he interrupts himself in order to emphasize his thought by recasting in a somewhat different form: and to know **the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge.** He has seemed to describe 19 the love of Christ in terms of dimension; but makes haste to add, 'this is only the limitation of human language, for it can never be measured.'

This prayer that his readers may know the love which is too vast for knowledge may be said to mark the climax of the epistle. It has been concerned with a divine mystery to the revelation of which all God's dealings with the world have led up since the beginning. The mystery now becomes one with **the love of Christ**; to know this is to know what is deepest in the nature and purpose of God. One point must here be noted which is vital for the understanding of the epistle, and which has been too much neglected in recent expositions. At first sight the main interest of the apostle's thought may seem to be metaphysical. He appears to exalt 'knowledge' to the primary place, like the Gnostics and the Alexandrian Fathers; and the inference has been drawn that the original message was now beginning to transform itself into a Hellenistic philosophy. But throughout the epistle, and most notably in the present passage, the language of Hellenistic thought is employed to enforce ideas which are in the profoundest sense Christian. 'Gnosis' was the current term for that higher knowledge which could penetrate the secrets of the invisible world, and was supposed to be the endowment of rarely gifted minds which had undergone a special enlightenment.

Paul here speaks of **the love of Christ** as the supreme subject of **knowledge.** In other words, he regards the highest knowledge as consisting not so much in any activity of mind as in that disposition which can respond to the divine love, and which Jesus himself described as the child-like heart. No doubt Paul thinks of this openness to Christ's message as endowing the believer with a new power of insight, capable of apprehending the hidden counsels of God. Knowing the love of Christ a man is enabled to grasp the mysterious truth that all things are to be reunited in Christ, and thereby to answer the riddles which have hitherto baffled human thought. But this new insight is one, in the last resort, with the Christian will. The highest knowledge is not a function of the intellect, but comes of its own accord through fellowship with Christ.

The prayer culminates in the words that they **may be filled with the entire fulness of God**, or, to translate quite literally, 'up to all the measure of God's fulness.' The idea is not that of attaining to divine perfection, for Paul has just said that this cannot even be conceived by man. He means rather 'the fulfilment which God intends for you'—just as elsewhere he speaks of 'the righteousness of God,' 'the peace of God.' Perhaps the word **fulness** is to be taken here in its simple sense of 'fulfilment.' The Christian, as we are told later in the epistle, is so to yield himself to Christ as to grow up to his full stature. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that **fulness** is one of the characteristic terms of the epistle, and has a close bearing on the main conception that all things are to find their ultimate harmony in Christ (cf. 1 : 23, where the noun and the verb are conjoined, as in the present verse). So Paul may wish to suggest that his readers, in proportion as they know the love of Christ, will attain not only to their own fulfilment, but to complete harmony with God's eternal purpose.

DOXOLOGY (3 : 20, 21)

Now to him who by the action of his power within us can do 20
all things, aye far more than we ever ask or imagine,
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through- 21
out all generations for ever and ever : Amen.

It is Paul's practice to mark the great divisions of his epistles by ascriptions of praise to God. Thus in Romans the argument proceeds by successive waves which fall away in the doxologies at the end of chaps. 8, 11, 15. The first main section of the present epistle has now closed, and before he enters on a new train of thought Paul pronounces his doxology : **Now to him who can** (is able to) **do all things,** 20 infinitely beyond what we can ask for or conceive, according to the power which keeps working in us. Paul has prayed that God would bestow a blessing that transcends man's knowledge, and he is confident that even this may be granted. For God **can do all things,** and by faith in Him we can cause His power to work in us, accomplishing **far more** for us **than we** can **ever imagine.**

This is the conception which underlies all Paul's thinking—that through the gospel a divine power is made operative in man's life. All things have now become possible. To God, therefore, who gives us this new power, **be glory in the church** 21 **and in Christ Jesus.** This is undoubtedly the true reading, but from an early time it seems to have raised difficulty, and was changed into 'glory in the church by Christ Jesus' (as in the A.V.). Certainly there is no parallel elsewhere to the strange phrase by which the Church seems here to be equated with Christ; but Paul deliberately expresses himself in this manner so as to gather up, as he closes, the whole train of thought which he has been following. His theme has been the work of reconciliation which God has purposed in Christ. The work has begun in the Church, but is to extend from this immediate sphere until it covers the universe. The Church is 'the fulness of him who fills all in all.' So these words of doxology may be paraphrased 'to him be glory not only in the church but in that infinite realm of being of which Christ is the centre.' This same idea that the work of Christ has an endless significance is implied in the closing words, in which all the terms that can suggest duration of time are heaped together: literally, 'to all the generations of the age of the ages.' The whole of time and eternity is conceived as one 'age' which is divided into many 'ages,' and each of these into 'generations.' As glory is to be ascribed to God throughout the universe, so it is to endure without interruption **throughout all generations for ever and ever.**

Chapters 4–6.—It is Paul's custom to divide his epistles into two main sections—one in which he discusses great religious principles, and one of practical exhortation. This division must not be understood too sharply, for in his theological chapters he is never forgetful of practical issues, and his exhortations are always linked up with great principles. In almost every instance, too, the two divisions are closely related to each other. The ideas which are applied to the business of life in the latter part of the epistle are as a rule those which have been demonstrated, on large religious grounds, in the earlier. The usual division is observed in Ephesians, but in this epistle, pitched as it is in a peculiar key, we can hardly speak of a theological and a hortatory section. In the earlier half of the letter Paul has indeed dealt with great religious conceptions, but has presented them in the form of a prayer. The exhortation to which he now passes is also conceived in a devotional spirit, which is reflected in the solemn character of the thought and language.

In Ephesians, too, much more than in any other epistle, Paul carries the ideas of the earlier section into the more practical teaching. The two halves of the epistle, indeed, answer to one another, and present the same line of thought in different aspects, thereby impressing it more plainly and forcibly.

It has been shewn in the first three chapters that the Church is God's instrument for reconciling all things in Christ. In the light of this truth Paul now considers what is required of the Church in its common life, and in the relations of its members with one another. Its duty is to exemplify that harmony which God has purposed to bring about by means of it. If it is to fulfil the great work entrusted to it, there must be an end to all discords in its own life. All who belong to it must be inspired by love to one another, and must learn to co-operate in their various functions with a full mutual understanding. According as it is thus united within itself the Church will be effectual in its divine task of helping Christ to reunite all things in himself.

The Unity of the Church amidst all Differences

(4 : 1–16)

iv.

As the Lord's prisoner, then, I beg of you to live a life worthy 1
of your calling, with perfect modesty and gentleness, 2
showing forbearance to one another patiently, zealous in 3
love to preserve the unity of the Spirit by binding peace
upon yourselves. For there is one Body and one Spirit— 4
as you were called for the one hope that belongs to your
call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and 5 6
Father of all, who is over us all, who pervades us all, who
is within us all. But each one of us is granted his own 7
grace, as determined by the full measure of Christ's gift.
Thus it is said, 8

> *When he ascended on high he led a host captive*
> *and granted gifts to men.*

What does *he ascended* mean, except that he first descended 9
to the nether regions of the earth? He who descended 10

is he who ascended above all the heavens to fill the
11 universe; he *granted* some men to be apostles, some to
be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to shepherd and
12 teach, for the equipment of the saints, for the business of
the ministry, for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ,
13 till we should all attain the unity of the faith and knowledge
of God's Son, reaching maturity, reaching the full measure
of development which belongs to the fulness of Christ—
14 instead of remaining immature, blown from our course
and swayed by every passing wind of doctrine, by the
adroitness of men who are dexterous in devising error;
15 we are to hold by the truth, and by our love to grow up
16 wholly into Him. For He, Christ, is the head and under
him, as the entire Body is welded together and compacted
by every joint with which it is supplied, the due activity
of each part enables the Body to grow and build itself
up in love.

Before he enters on detailed exhortation Paul dwells on the thought that the Church is one, and that this unity is something more than a dead uniformity. God has bestowed on His servants a variety of gifts, all of them demanding their own kinds of exercise. It might seem at first sight as if the effect of bringing men into one Church had been only to accentuate their natural differences. But the free play thus afforded to all the differences can be seen, on a deeper view, to have produced a higher type of unity. Nothing is more truly one than the body, with its multiplicity of parts all performing their several functions, and yet helping and supplementing each other. The unity of the Church is this corporate unity. The more each individual becomes himself and makes his particular contribution to the common life, the more will the Church as a whole attain to oneness.

1 Paul addresses his readers with the authority belonging to one who has suffered in Christ's cause: **the Lord's prisoner** is literally 'the prisoner in the Lord.' Previously he has called himself the prisoner of Jesus (3:1), implying that Christ, for some purpose of his own, has put him in bonds.

Here the thought is the more general one—that in his service of Christ he has become a prisoner, and has thus won the right to advise his fellow-Christians.

He has been speaking in the chapters before of the wonderful destiny of the Church into which Christ has called them. Now he bids them **lead a life worthy** of their **calling,** with a 2 due sense of the obligations which it has laid on them. They are to conduct themselves **with perfect modesty** (literally, all humility) **and gentleness,** in mutual **forbearance** and **love.** These virtues are insisted on, not only because they are the distinctive Christian virtues, but because there cannot be any real community without them. The duty of the Church, as Paul is about to make clear, is to exemplify the harmony which God has planned to restore through Christ. Each member of it, therefore, must be willing to give up his own selfish interests and study the common good. All are to be 3 **zealous** (or eager) **to preserve the unity of the Spirit by binding peace upon** themselves. The conception which is here touched on is developed at full length in 1 Cor. 12, where it is shewn that while there are diversities of gifts there is the same Spirit. In all the manifold activities of the Church the same power is at work, employing different men for different purposes. Since they are all possessed by the one Spirit Christians are to feel themselves knit together by a common bond. In Col. 3 : 14 this link or bond is love ; here it is peace, but the thought is much the same, especially if, as in our translation, **in love** is connected with this appeal. The peace which unites the Church is conceived of as no mere formal one, imposed by some outward authority. All the members are at peace with one another because they are bound together by love.

The conditions of unity in the Church are now more fully stated. **There is one Body and one Spirit—as you were called** 4 **for** (literally, in) **the one hope that belongs to your call.** Paul again falls back on his conception of the Church as the Body of Christ. Just as the body is one because it is controlled in all its parts by one living principle, so the Church is one because its members all participate in the same Spirit. Not only so, but they are united by one purpose, 'one hope with which your calling has inspired you.' St. Augustine has somewhere said that the only thing which effectually unites men is a common desire for the same ends. This is the thought in Paul's mind here. According as they share in one great hope, Christian men will feel themselves brethren. It has often been observed that in a time of stress, when all are waiting anxiously on the issue of some critical event, a nation is suddenly fused together; all party differences that formerly bulked so largely are forgotten. Paul thinks of the Christian hope as acting continually to produce this union.

5 From the hope which inspires all Christians Paul turns to the common ground for holding it: **one Lord, one faith, one baptism.** This well-known verse is usually taken as marking three essential things on which all Christians are agreed. They worship the same Lord, hold the same faith, practise the same baptismal rite. But if Paul intended to single out the unifying factors in our religion it is hard to see why he limited himself to these three. He might have mentioned the Lord's Supper as well as baptism. He might have touched on those moral and spiritual ideals which are common to all Christians and on experiences which they all share. It is better to take the whole sentence as expressive of a single fundamental fact: 'one Lord in whom we all believe and in whose name we have been baptized.' The great bond of union among Christians is their service to the one Lord, and this truth is emphatically stated by means of the triple formula.

6 But the common profession of Christ involves something more, which is the ultimate ground of all the unity; **one God and Father of all, who is over all,** and through all and in all. As the whole context shews, Paul is thinking of God's relation to His people, not of His sovereignty over the universe. To make this perfectly clear some MSS. read 'in you all' or **within us all** (as in Moffatt's translation), but the pronouns seem to have been added later, and are not necessary. Just as in the previous verse, a threefold phrase is

used to describe the relation to God in which all Christians are united. God is **over** them all; His presence **pervades** the Church to which they belong; He dwells **within** their very hearts. The three clauses are all meant to emphasize the same truth—that our life is inseparably bound up with God, our common Father.

After insisting on the unity of the Church Paul tells of the diversity of gifts which have been bestowed on its members. It is still, however, the thought of the unity which occupies his mind. He seeks to shew how the different modes of service are all directed to the same end, so that their variety only ensures that the Church is more closely knit together. The line of thought is very similar to that which is followed in 1 Cor. 12, where Paul presents, with a fuller wealth of detail, his great conception that the Church is a living organism. Its unity is not that of a block of stone, made up of innumerable pieces which are all exactly alike, but that of a body, in which the parts are all interdependent because of their very differences. In the present passage, however, the thought has a mystical import which is wanting from the parallel in 1 Corinthians. Paul is there content to use the idea of a body in a figurative manner, so as to enforce the truth that the highest kind of unity is that which involves difference. Here he is seeking to make out that the Church is in some real sense a body. Christ has created a new man in whom he himself is again incarnate, fulfilling on a vaster scale the work he began on earth. For the harmonious activity of this Body of Christ all the functions which are distributed through the various members are equally necessary. 7

'But to each of us grace was given, according to the measure of the gift of Christ.' The thought is the same as in 3 : 7 (cf. also Rom. 12 : 3). Christ has bestowed some particular spiritual gift on every one of his people: **each is granted his own grace.** No one is to feel that he is useless and negligible in the life of the Church, for there is always something which he alone can do, some service **determined** for him, some talent which is entrusted to him and to no one else. But the Spirit is given to different men in different measures. Some have a notable gift which can be exercised in a conspicuous manner in Christ's service ; others have humbler functions which are necessarily restricted to some narrow and obscure sphere. Each one must be content with the measure in which Christ has chosen to bestow his gift. Each one is to feel, likewise, that his own endowment, however apparently humble, is just as authentically a gift of the Spirit as those which are prized most highly. Wordsworth may have had this idea of Paul in mind when he compares the different poets to stars, some ' pre-eminent in magnitude,' others hardly visible, but all burning with the same heavenly fire. So he concludes, much as Paul does here—

> So to the measure of the light vouchsafed
> Shine, poet, in thy place and be content.

8 According to his custom, Paul adduces a text of scripture as proof of the statement he has just made. The text is introduced by the formula—**Thus it is said** (i.e. by God), or ' wherefore he says ' (i.e. God Himself says it through the Holy Spirit). It was never doubted by pious Jews in Paul's time that all scripture was directly inspired. The name of the human writer could be left out of account and his words quoted as the literal words of God. Paul himself shared this mode of thinking, and is never satisfied unless he can offer God's own testimony in scripture as the final proof of his argument. The text here quoted is from Ps. 68 : 18 : **When he ascended on high he led a host** (took his prisoners) **captive and granted gifts to men.** This version of Paul's, however, is strangely different from the original. Instead of **he granted gifts** the Psalmist wrote, ' he received gifts.' He imagines God as a victor, marching up to the opened gates of the stronghold he has won, and receiving tribute from His vanquished enemies. Paul applies the verse to Christ's ascension to heaven, and reads into it the meaning that after his exaltation Christ distributed the gifts of the Spirit to his people. This fanciful interpretation is fully in keeping with the methods of Rabbinical exegesis, and numerous parallels to it can be found in the New Testament. To our minds it

appears purely arbitrary, but when scripture was regarded as the immediate utterance of the Spirit it was natural to believe that hidden meanings lay beneath the literal words. The chief aim of scriptural exposition was to discover such meanings, with the aid of the Spirit which had concealed them.

Paul, however, not merely applies his own interpretation to the text but changes it, and bases his comment on the very word he has substituted. It is hard to believe that he would deliberately take this liberty with a text of scripture. Perhaps his error is due to a trick of memory. More likely he is thinking not so much of the original Psalm as of a Jewish paraphrase of it, familiar in the teaching of the synagogue. A Rabbinical commentary is still extant, in which the passage is applied to Moses, with the same change in the principal word as Paul makes here. The reference to ‘taking captivity captive’ (a Hebrew idiom for leading away one's prisoners) takes on a special significance in Paul's allegory. He understands it, apparently, of that spoiling of principalities and powers of which he spoke in Col. 2 : 15. By his death Christ conquered all that host of spirits which had conspired against him, and he is pictured as leading them captive in his train when he ascended.

The next two verses (9, 10) are thrown in parenthetically—it is hard to say for what purpose. According to one view Paul is merely seeking to prove that the reference in the Psalm he has quoted must be to Christ. It speaks of one who ascended, and who therefore must have first come down. Since only Christ fulfilled these conditions, the Spirit which inspired the words was manifestly pointing to him. But more probably the true motive of the parenthesis is to be found in its closing words about ‘filling the universe.’ Paul is anxious to lay stress again on the conception which pervades the epistle, and to shew its bearing on the fact which he is now considering, and which at first sight might seem remote from it. By traversing the whole region from the depths to the heights Christ asserted his relation to all existence. He made it evident that in him all things were centred.

It was this sovereignty he has over all activities and powers which made it possible for him to bestow such a variety of gifts on the Church.

9 **What does ' he ascended ' mean except that he descended to the nether** (lower) **regions of the earth** ? (Some MSS. read *he first descended* but the addition is doubtful.) Here, as in a number of places elsewhere, Paul adopts the Rabbinical device of singling out some particular phrase or word of scripture so as to extract from it a hidden significance. The word on which he lays this emphasis is **ascended.** He argues that there can be no ascent without a previous descent, and that scripture had therefore declared that Christ would go down **to the nether regions of the earth.** There has been much discussion as to the precise meaning of this obscure phrase. It may signify nothing more than ' this lower earth ' in contrast to the heavenly abode from which Christ had come. Or perhaps it alludes to his burial ; out of the darkness of the grave he arose into the world of light. But in view of the context we are justified in assuming a more definite reference. Paul is seeking to shew that Christ had ' filled all things '—had proved himself supreme through the whole world of existence. He had descended lower than the earth and risen higher than the heavens. So we may here discern the earliest hint of the belief that in the interval between his death and Resurrection Christ had descended into the under-world and proclaimed his message to the dead.

At the time when 1 Peter was written (apparently about thirty years after the present epistle) this belief had become an integral part of Christian doctrine (cf. 1 Pet. 3 : 19 f., 4 : 6). It was finally adopted into the Apostles' Creed as one of the primary tenets of the faith. How it first originated we cannot tell, but several factors may have worked together in its formation.

(1) Almost from the beginning the Christian mind must have been occupied with the problem of the mysterious three days' interval after the Lord's death. Was his life entirely suspended ? Did he go down like other men into that shadowy world where the dead await judgment ? If he so

descended must he not somehow have continued the work he began on earth ?

(2) The belief has almost certainly some connexion with the mythologies current in the first century. One of the most widely spread of religious legends was that of the divinity or hero who was permitted to enter the abode of the dead. Isis and Ishtar had thus descended to deliver a husband or son. Orpheus had gone among the dead to reclaim Eurydice ; Herakles, Odysseus, Aeneas had visited the under-world. When Christianity had taken root in the Pagan countries it was inevitable that this legend should attach itself in some form to Jesus—all the more so, as that mysterious break in his career had to be accounted for.

(3) Perhaps the chief motive that gave rise to the belief was a purely religious one. Christ had come for man's salvation, but what of those who had lived before his coming ? Among them there must have been countless men and women who would have gladly responded to him ; were they lost because they had never had a chance of knowing his message ? This is a problem which has often exercised the minds of Christians in times since, and it was solved in the first century by that doctrine of the descent to Hades. As Christ had offered his gospel to the living, so he had carried it to the dead.

In this passage, however, Paul's interest in the doctrine is 10 that it associated Christ with the lower world as well as with heaven and earth, so that we may say of him that he had **filled all things**. As in other passages in these epistles, the word **fill** may be better rendered 'fulfil.' Christ could hardly be said to **fill** all those spheres of **the universe** by the mere fact that he had visited them. Paul's idea is rather that he had brought them all within the compass of God's plan. His task had been to reunite all things in himself, and in the accomplishment of this mission he had put himself into relation with every part of God's world.

The gifts which Christ bestowed after his ascension are 11 now enumerated. **He 'granted' some men to be apostles** (i.e. endowed them with the *charisma* which qualified them for that work), **some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to shepherd and teach.** The classification of spiritual functions is similar to that in 1 Cor. 12 : 28, but varies from it at several points. Everywhere in the New Testament **the apostles** appear as the highest order in the early ministry. They had the gift or combination of gifts which enabled them to be leaders. Their work was that of pioneering—opening up new missionary fields and awakening faith for the first time. The second place, likewise, is always given to **the prophets,** who are often coupled with the apostles. It was through them that the Spirit expressed its will. They possessed the gift of insight into the future and the secrets of the unseen world, and declared their visions in various forms of ecstatic utterance. In 1 Corinthians Paul assigns the third place to teachers ; here he speaks of **evangelists** and shepherds or pastors as ranking above them. The **evangelists,** as their name signifies, were preachers of the gospel, whose ministry, it would seem, was itinerant as distinguished from that of the ' shepherds ' or pastors. There are several references in the New Testament to **teachers,** as to men who were endowed with a peculiar spiritual gift. Their work, therefore, must have consisted not so much in offering instruction as in discovering the deeper meanings which were contained in scripture or in the actions and sayings of Jesus. Our epistle to the Hebrews is apparently the work of a teacher, and perhaps it was a teacher of still higher gifts who wrote the Fourth Gospel.

Paul enumerates these various servants of the Church in order to illustrate his statement that the ' gifts ' were many. As yet there was no official ministry. Men were not formally appointed to given offices, but exercised them as a matter of course in virtue of the special endowments which they had received from the Spirit.

12 The gifts, whatever their nature and measure, were all bestowed ' for the co-ordination of the saints, with a view to the work of service.' This is probably how the first part of the verse should be punctuated and understood. Paul is shewing how the servants of Christ in their **ministry** were all

differently endowed, but this is incidental to his main thought of the unity of the Church. The differences had for their object a more vital unity. So he declares here that the gifts all aimed at 'fitting together' (**the equipment of**) **the saints**, i.e. making an harmonious body out of many separate individuals, so that each member should perform his **business** or special task the better because all worked together. Thus the first part of the verse is explained by the second part—**for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ.** In both parts there is the same metaphor of fitting separate stones into a single edifice, with the further suggestion that the work is to be solid and permanent. The variety of the contributions is to result in one enduring Church.

These different thoughts are all combined in the verse 13 that follows: 'until we come all together to **the unity of the faith and knowledge of God's Son, reaching maturity** (growing into a full-grown man), attaining to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (so A.V.). Paul is not speaking of individual progress in the Christian life, but of the building up of the Church as a whole. Hence the opening words are not to be translated **till we should all attain** but rather 'till we come in our totality'—all of us in a single body. This is evident from the next words, which speak of attaining a **unity of faith and knowledge.** In all its belief and doctrine the Church is to become perfectly one. Paul is conscious, as the next verses shew, of the danger of division in consequence of the strange doctrines which were arising here and there and producing sects and parties. Such division, it is implied, is contrary to the very purpose of the Church. God intends it to be His instrument in the great work of reconciliation, and at all costs it must preserve its unity. The idea that all members of the Church constitute a single whole is expressed even more forcibly in the next words: 'till we grow into an adult man.' There is no reference here to individuals attaining their Christian maturity. The thought is that of the Church as a single organism, growing to its full strength, **reaching maturity**, and so becoming entirely adequate to the purpose for which God intended it.

This idea of a completely developed man is carried out in further detail by the allusion to 'stature.' The Greek word may be translated either 'stature' or 'age.' In Matt. 6 : 27 it seems to have the latter meaning ; no one by taking thought can add to his allotted span of life. Here it clearly means the stature, and 'the measure of the stature' is **the full** height or **measure of development** to which a man is intended to grow. The added words about **the fulness of Christ** may serve merely to emphasize this idea : 'the full stature which Christ himself attained to,' and which sets the ideal for his Church. But we have seen that throughout the epistle a peculiar sense is attached to the word **fulness,** and it may be presumed to carry the same implication here. The Church is the **fulness of Christ,** his larger incarnation, the instrument whereby he fulfils his purpose. So the apostle looks forward to a time when the Church will have reached its **maturity** and will be perfectly fitted for the work to which it is appointed. It will **attain** to such a **development** or stature that Christ will have his fulfilment in the Church.

14 Following out his image of the mature or full-grown man, Paul now addresses a word of practical warning to his readers merging his idea of the Church as a whole with that of the individual members who compose it : 'That we be no longer children, tossed about and carried hither and thither by every wind of teaching.' The thought of an adult man suggests the contrast of an **immature** child, with no mind of his own. The sudden change of metaphor from a child to a rudderless boat may seem rather odd to our modern taste, but these mixed metaphors were freely admitted in ancient literature. The image is further complicated by the description of how the boat is **blown from its course and swayed** 'by the trickery of men, practised with evil motives, with a crafty design to lead astray.' Here the metaphor (as the Greek word implies) is that of a game at dice, where a sharper cheats and misleads his victim. Paul compares the false teachers who were making mischief in the Church with those **dexterous,** unscrupulous gamesters. Their plausible arguments were like loaded dice ; the whole aim of their

adroitness was to entrap the unsuspecting and get some advantage by foul means.

Like controversialists in most times, Paul was probably wrong in imputing dishonest motives and practices to his opponents. Some of them, we can well believe, were unscrupulous and self-seeking, but we know that among the heretics of the later age were many noble souls, who sincerely believed that they had discovered a higher truth. It was no doubt the same in Paul's own day. In any case he is not directly concerned with the false teachers as he was in Colossians. He does not trouble, in this epistle, to refute their doctrines, and only glances at them here as men who are seeking to make disunion in the Church by **devising error.** Believing as he does that the one great task of the Church is to promote God's purpose of harmony, he cannot but think of those divisive teachers as bent on destroying the work of God.

Instead of yielding, then, to **every passing wind** of influence, we are **to hold by the truth** in love and **grow up** in all things 15 **into him.** The A.V. translates 'speaking the truth in love,' but Paul is evidently thinking of true belief and conduct rather than of true speech. In spite of all teachers who would lead them into error, the followers of Christ are to hold firmly to the true Christian message, and they are to maintain this truth **in love.** It is possible to take these words with the next part of the sentence, and Moffatt has done so in his translation : **by our love to grow up wholly into him.** But from the point of view both of grammar and meaning they seem to fit in better with what has just been said. Paul is insisting on unity as the grand aim which the Church must keep before it, and there can be no unity without love. True doctrine is indeed necessary, but there is a type of orthodoxy which is harsh and repellent. It would not be difficult to shew from history that the rigid maintenance of **truth** has done more to divide the Church than any heretical teaching. Paul recognizes this, and desires that our zeal for truth should be tempered by the loving spirit. This willingness to bear with those who differ from us will do more to advance the truth than any dogmatic assertiveness.

This idea is in Paul's mind when he goes on to say that in all things we are to **grow up into** (better, to) the Head. The thought as a whole simply repeats that of ver. 13. Since the Church is the body of Christ, it should develop in such a way as to correspond with Christ ; the body is to express perfectly the purposes and impulses which have their origin in the head. But there is the added thought that this full conformity **to Christ** is a matter of love as well as of right knowledge. If the Church is to grow up freely in all its activities as an harmonious whole it must be controlled by
16 Christ's spirit of love. **For he, Christ, is the head** 'from whom the Body is fitted together and compacted through every ligament of supply.'

The thought and language are adopted from Col. 2 : 19, and have to be explained in the same manner. Paul looks at the body from the point of view of ancient medical science. It was believed that the cohesion of the body was due to two factors : (*a*) to the contact of one part with another ; (*b*) to the nerves and tissues which bind all the different parts together like cords. These ligaments not only unify the body, but serve as the channels by which it receives its nourishment. The servants of Christ, on whom he bestowed the various spiritual gifts, are conceived as thus binding the Church together and conveying to every part of it the vitality they have derived from the head. Thus united and sustained, **welded together and compacted,** the Church continues to grow 'according to the working in measure of each several part.' Every element of the body, however insignificant, has something to contribute towards the well-being of the whole. **Each part** or member has its **due activity** or appointed function which it performs just in the measure required. In this manner the multiplicity of parts, all working together, 'effects the increase of the Body towards the building up of itself in love.' All through the passage Paul has been seeking to express and illustrate the great principle that the highest kind of unity is achieved through difference. In these closing words he applies this principle to the Church. It grows, as the body does, because all the members that compose it are different, and are yet pervaded by some element which keeps them in harmony and enables them to act as one. This unifying element in the life of the Church is **love.**

THE CHURCH AS AGAINST THE HEATHEN WORLD (4 : 17–24)

Now in the Lord I insist and protest that you must give up 17
living like pagans ; for their purposes are futile, their 18
intelligence is darkened, they are estranged from the life
of God by the ignorance which their dulness of heart has
produced in them—men who have recklessly[1] abandoned 19
themselves to sensuality, with a lust for the business of
impurity in every shape and form. That is not how you 20
have understood the meaning of Christ (for it is Christ 21
whom you have been taught, it is in Christ that you have
been instructed—the real Christ who is in Jesus) ; you 22
must lay aside the old nature which belonged to your
former course of life, that nature which crumbles to ruin
under the passions of moral deceit, and be renewed in the 23
spirit of your mind, putting on the new nature, that 24
divine pattern which has been created in the upright and
pious character of the Truth.

Paul has described the Church as one, a single organism which derives its whole life from Christ. The members who compose it are all different from each other, but they are bound up together and direct their various activities to a common end. This Church, however, while it is united within itself, stands over against the world. In all their behaviour Christians are to shew that they are separate. They have broken away from that heathen life which is controlled by lower, sensual motives, and have their part in the new life which is rooted in Christ.

‘ This, therefore, I declare and testify in the Lord, that 17
you should no longer live as the Gentiles live in the vanity

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[1] Reading *ἀπηλπικότες* with D G, the Latin version, the Syriac Vulgate, Irenaeus, Victorinus, etc.

of their mind.' Paul calls them to witness **in the Lord**, i.e. as a Christian pleading with Christians. He has just shewn that the Church is vitally related to Christ, and that this relation must govern it in all its action. There can therefore be no doubt as to the Christian attitude towards the Pagan type of life. The **pagans** live ' in the vanity of their mind,' i.e. without any real purpose, content to enjoy a sensual, empty existence. In Rom. 8 : 20 Paul uses the same expressive word when he says that in consequence of man's sin the creation was made subject to ' vanity '—it had been emptied of reality and meaning. The life of the pagans is of this
18 **futile** kind because they have been darkened in their intelligence, so that they cannot discern the true ends for which God has placed man in the world. **Their intelligence is darkened. They are estranged from the life of God.** It was God Himself who had created man and breathed into him His own Spirit, and it was man's original destiny to participate in the divine life. The Gentiles had frustrated this intention of God ' through the ignorance that is in them because of the dulness of their heart.'

This description of the state of the heathen world is best understood in the light of the profound analysis in Rom. 1 : 18 ff., where Paul traces back to its ultimate causes the moral corruption which was everywhere manifest in the pagan society of his time. It was due, he declares, to a perversion of the religious instincts. God had revealed Himself to the Gentiles in the world of nature and in the moral law which was written in their hearts, but they had refused, in their intellectual pride, to accept this revelation—with the result that they had lost the capacity for true knowledge. ' Professing themselves to be wise they had become fools,' and this ignorance plunged them ever deeper into moral error. Thus in Romans the sensuality of the heathen is the result of ignorance ; here it is rather viewed as the cause of it. The minds of the Gentiles have become so besotted with low vices that they can no longer distinguish between good and evil. Paul speaks of their ignorance as if it were something positive, not a mere lack of right knowledge, but a knowledge that has grown mischievous and misleading. The light that is in them is now darkness. All this has been **produced** by a **dulness** (literally a petrifying or callousness) **of heart,** due to vicious living. The man who habitually indulges in evil finally loses all the finer sensibilities. What began as a moral failing becomes also an intellectual one. That side of his mind which ought to respond to the higher things has become atrophied.

The idea is followed out in the further account of pagan 19 sensuality : ' since, being past feeling, they abandoned themselves to debauchery.' **Dulness,** or callousness, as used in the previous sentence, is a medical term, and it suggests another (*apelgekotes*) which implies a paralysis, or deadness to pain. In some MSS. this unusual word is replaced by one which differs from it only in two letters (*apelpikotes*), and which would give the meaning of despair or recklessness, but there seems to be no sufficient reason for adopting this variant (as in Moffatt's translation : **recklessly**). The idea involved in the usual text is a perfectly just and intelligible one. Pagan vices, as practised in the age of Nero, could only be set down to an utter deadness of the sense of right and wrong.

Paul describes the debauchery or **sensuality** which he saw around him by a word which carries the added meaning of shamelessness. There have been times in history when **sensuality** was just as rampant, but at no period has it been so little disguised. Men had **a lust for the business of impurity in every shape and form.** They flaunted their basest passions, gave a free rein to them ' for the working of every kind of impurity in self-indulgence.' This last word is that which our A.V. regularly translates by ' covetousness.' Sometimes this fairly well represents the meaning, but the Greek word, as we have already had occasion to note (cf. Col. 3 : 5), has a much wider significance. It denotes the whole disposition of which covetousness is one out of many symptoms (**a lust for**). The ' covetous ' man has no end in life but to assert his own ego, and is utterly heedless of the rights of others. In a number of New Testament passages this temper is singled out as characteristic of the pagan society, and is coupled with the other typical heathen sin of **impurity.** The two vices, as is suggested here, are closely related, both arising out of the mood of mind which looks wholly to the self and its demands. It is often observed that the man who spends his earlier life in sensuality becomes avaricious in his old age.

20 Over against such practices of the pagan world Paul sets those which are required of Christian men. 'You, however, did not so learn Christ.' Two thoughts are here combined: (*a*) you have come to the knowledge of Christ; (*b*) you cannot, therefore, live as the heathen do. To 'learn Christ' is itself a highly condensed phrase. It signifies at once to know about Christ and to understand the true ends of life as set forth in his gospel, i.e. **the meaning of Christ.** The verses that follow are meant to be an expansion and explana-
21 tion of the phrase: 'If indeed you heard him and were taught in him,' i.e. have heard his message and understood its meaning. Paul again uses a phrase into which he condenses a great deal. To be taught or **instructed in Christ** is not merely to be taught by him, or by the messengers who speak in his name. It suggests an inward union with the divine Teacher. The man who has truly heard Christ becomes possessed of his mind and will. This, indeed, is the expression which Paul gives to the same thought in 1 Cor. 2 : 16: **our thoughts are Christ's thoughts**—we have learned to look at everything with his eyes. It is doubtless in a similar manner that we must interpret the difficult words that follow. The A.V. renders them, 'as the truth is in Jesus.' Moffatt understands the phrase to mean that **the real Christ,** the Messiah in whom God's will is fully revealed to us, has now appeared **in Jesus.** But a thought of this kind seems foreign to the passage. Paul is reflecting, rather, on the words he has just used—'taught or **instructed in him.'** That, he says, is to be taught the truth. All that we can conceive of the highest knowledge is contained in Jesus; he represents the complete will of God, the true meaning of life.

22 So after reminding them that Christ had been their teacher

he speaks of what they had learned. The passage repeats what has been said already in Col. 3 : 9, 10, but the language of the earlier epistle is amplified and made more definite. 'That you should put off (**lay aside**), as regards your former conduct, the old man (**nature**).' The corresponding passage in Colossians had spoken generally of **the old nature with its practices.** This allusion is here explicitly related to the account of pagan wickedness which has just been given. It is implied that the readers had themselves been guilty of those sins of the flesh, prevalent in the heathen world. The evil will which had led them astray is described as 'the old man,' i.e. **the old nature** or self. This phrase is meant to suggest that a radical change is necessary. Not only have old habits to be corrected, but the whole personality must be renewed. **The old nature** is one '**which crumbles to ruin** (keeps decaying) **under the** lusts of deceit,' i.e. lusts that work by **moral deceit.** It is the chief danger of sensual **passions** that they are insidious in their action. Little by little they taint a man's thought and will, until they finally destroy his inner life. The idea is frequent in Paul that man's earthly nature is liable to a corruption which has its final outcome in death. This decay is inherent in the flesh, which is the seat of all evil impulses and desires. In order 23
to counteract the fleshly principle it is necessary **to be renewed in the spirit of your mind.** The **spirit** seems here to have its wider meaning of the disposition. Men must seek to be renewed in the whole direction of their will. This renewal, however, can only be effected by the action of God's Spirit, and Paul wishes his word to carry this suggestion. The new life is described as a garment which takes the place of that which is discarded. 'Put **on the new nature** (literally man), 24
that divine pattern which has been created (literally, created according to God, i.e. in God's image) in righteousness and holiness **of the Truth.**'

Paul goes back to the story in Genesis, which tells how man was created sinless. It is implied that this **upright and pious** character which was originally his has been restored to man through Christ. Or perhaps the idea is a still subtler one, that man's true creation has only now taken effect. The life in Eden was nothing but the foreshadowing of what God intended man to become, and this promise of a higher nature has at last been realized. This might almost seem to be indicated in the words, 'in righteousness and holiness belonging to the truth.' In contrast to the lusts or passions of deceit, Paul defines the qualities which are of the Truth—righteous or upright dealing with our fellow-men, holy or pious obedience to God. They proceed from God's Spirit, and keep restoring man's higher nature instead of tainting and destroying it. In the Fourth Gospel the word truth is commonly used in the sense of higher reality—the divine essence of things as opposed to earthly appearances. A similar meaning seems to attach to it here. Righteousness and holiness belong to man's life in its ideal character, and they are given us in the new creation through Christ.

THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE NEW LIFE (4 : 25–5 : 2)

25 Lay aside falsehood, then, *let each tell his neighbour the truth,*
26 for we are members one of another. *Be angry but do*
not sin ; never let the sun set upon your exasperation,
27 give the devil no chance.
28 Let the thief steal no more ;
rather let him work and put his hands to an honest task,
so as to have something to contribute to the needy.
29 Let no bad word pass your lips, but only such speech as
is good for edification, as occasion may require, words
that are gracious and a means of grace to those who hear
30 them. And do not vex God's holy Spirit, by whom you
31 have been sealed for the day of redemption. Drop all
bitter feeling and passion and anger and clamouring and
32 insults, together with all malice ; be kind to each other,
v. be tender-hearted, be generous to each other as God has
1 been generous to you in Christ. Copy God, then, as his
2 beloved children, and lead lives of love, just as Christ
loved you and gave himself up for you to be *a fragrant*
offering and sacrifice to God.

Paul has told his readers how they have now passed into a new moral condition, in which the old passions and vices are to have no place. He has indicated in general terms the sort of conduct which is now required of them, but he proceeds to illustrate it by a number of specific examples. The exhortations are much the same as those which closed the Colossian epistle, but there they had no other purpose than to bring into clear relief the character of the Christian life. Here they have a close bearing on the main theme of the epistle. God has determined to reunite all things in Christ, and has ordained the Church as the instrument by which He will fulfil this purpose of reconciliation. Within itself, therefore, the Church must be united. All those evils which make for enmity and distrust are to be put away.

The exhortation begins, as in Colossians (3 : 9), with a 25
warning against **falsehood.** In Colossians the warning is based on a demand to put off the old nature, and this idea survives in the present passage, which otherwise takes a different direction. 'Having put off falsehood, speak truth each man with his neighbour, for **we are members one of another.'** The warning is stated in a quotation from Zech. 8 : 16, and Paul then gives his own reason for it. Christians are all interrelated like members of the body, and must therefore be able to depend on one another. Lying is the
very root of all offences against brotherhood. In like manner 26
he condemns anger, again expressing himself in scriptural language. The quotation (Ps. 4 : 6) ought properly to run as in our A.V., 'Stand in awe and sin not,' but Paul gives it from his Greek Bible, '**Be angry** and sin not,' i.e. **do not sin** in your anger—**Be angry but do not sin.** It is here recognized that the impulse to anger is a natural one and may sometimes be right. There can be no greater mistake than to think of Christianity as excluding that just indignation of which we have memorable examples in the life of Jesus himself. But anger is always dangerous and must be kept in restraint. This is brought out in the caution that follows: 'Let not the sun go down on your fit of wrath, nor yet allow place to the devil.'

It was a wise rule with various ancient moralists (e.g. the

Pythagoreans) that all quarrels should be composed before sunset. Paul adopts the rule and shews why it is needed.

27 **Never let the sun set upon your exasperation.** The phrase 'allow place to wrath' is found also in Rom. 12 : 19, but there the meaning is that instead of exacting vengeance ourselves we should **let the wrath of God have its way,** leaving the evil-doer to be punished by God. Here it is implied that if anger is protracted beyond the day we play into the devil's hands; we **give the devil a chance.** All kinds of mischief arise out of quarrels, slight to begin with, which are allowed to stand and to become embittered. If they do not end in some deadly hostility they at least work havoc with a man's own soul, narrowing and souring him and distorting his whole outlook on life.

28 A further sin against the spirit of brotherhood is now touched on: 'Let him who steals no longer steal, but rather let him labour, performing honest work with his hands, that he may be able to impart to him that has need.' It may be assumed that in Christian communities there were none who could properly be called 'thieves.' Paul carefully avoids this word, and uses a more general one, which includes all sorts of efforts to secure a living at the expense of one's neighbours. The man who has thus lived as a parasite is to give himself to honest labour. **Rather let him work.** Some would translate what follows by 'earning his property with his hands,' and the Greek words are capable of this meaning. But it is better to take them in the wider sense, 'working what is good,' putting **his hands to an honest task,** i.e. doing honourable toil. The real point of the counsel is contained in the closing words. Christians are to feel that as members of the one community they are responsible for each other's well-being, and they can only **contribute** to this if they all have some **honest task** which will enable them to help a neighbour in time of need.

29 With the common welfare still in mind Paul now warns against evil speech. **Let no bad word pass your lips** (literally, proceed out of your mouth). The adjective (literally 'rotten') is one applied to anything worthless; so the reference

is to any kind of speech that may work mischief. Instead of producing evil all speech is to be '**for edification** of the need,' i.e. for serving the good of one's neighbour as his circumstances at the moment may require. Just as in Col. 4 : 5, 6, Paul is careful to throw in a caution to the well-meaning bore, who is always trying to improve other people, without regard to time or fitness. Edifying speech, he says, should be **as occasion may require**, suitable to the occasion, so that the words may be **gracious to those who hear them.** Paul here enforces his meaning by a kind of play on words. **Grace**, in the ordinary language of the time, implied good taste and urbanity ; for Paul it always suggested the idea of the goodness of God. In the present verse he combines both meanings (**gracious and a means of grace** being a periphrasis, to bring this out). Christian conversation ought to be such that it can be listened to with pleasure, and it ought, at the same time, to be religiously helpful, even when this quality in it is not obtruded on the notice.

The counsels now take a wider sweep. Everything is to 30 be avoided that is not in keeping with the new impulse which should control the Christian life. As before, Paul borrows language from the Old Testament to express his thought. In Isaiah (63 : 10) the words 'Do not grieve (or, vex) the holy Spirit of God' are used of Israel, which had ever and again refused the leading of God's Spirit. Paul thinks here of the Spirit which was at once the regenerating power in the believer and the unifying principle in the Church. These two operations of the Spirit go together. The more each individual life has been renewed the more will all causes of discord and enmity disappear from the Church. So he touches first on the sanctifying influence of the Spirit, **by whom you have been sealed for the day of redemption.** It has been noted already (cf. Eph. 1 : 13) that the idea of 'sealing' was taken over from the religious usage of the time and applied to baptism, the rite by which the convert was marked out as the possession of Christ. Since it was in baptism that he was supposed to receive the Spirit, it could be described as a 'sealing by the Spirit.' Here, however, Paul reads a further meaning into the familiar metaphor. One object of a seal was to make sure that the thing on which it was impressed should remain inviolate (e.g. a document, a box, a closed room). So the Christian is **sealed for** or to **the day of redemption.** His life is to be safeguarded against all influences that may seek to break in upon it from the world. He is to keep himself pure for Christ's service until Christ himself shall appear.

31 The idea of the Spirit is now enforced from another side. The Spirit makes for unity, and is vexed by every offence against the full brotherhood which ought to prevail in the Church. 'Let all bitterness and passion and anger and clamour and slander be removed from you, along with all malice.' Paul heaps together all those manifestations of ill-feeling which set men against each other—the anger of **bitter feeling** that is sullen, the anger of **passion** that finds vent in violence and outcry (**clamour**), the spite that expresses itself in **insults,** in mean criticisms, and false accusations. Al these must be dropped, and along with them the malicious temper out of which they arise. The evil passions are to
32 give place to their opposites : **Be kind to each other, be tender-hearted,** 'forgiving one another as God also in Christ forgave you.' This is put forward as the one motive which will make it possible to maintain the merciful spirit. As men remember the **generous** mercy they have received from God, they cannot be harsh and unforgiving to their fellow-men. The verse brings out the other side of the idea embodied in the Lord's Prayer : 'Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.' According as we forgive one another we may hope to be forgiven, but of ourselves we cannot exercise this mutual forgiveness. The impulse to do so is created in us when we know God and the **generous** mercy which He has offered us.

v. This thought of God's love to us as the inspiring motive
1 is carried farther. 'Be imitators, then, of God as his beloved children, and walk in love.' Paul may here have in mind the saying of Jesus **that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven** (Matt. 5 : 45). It would not be too much to

say that these words embody the thought which underlies all Jesus's teaching. As children of God men are to **copy God,** taking their example from Him. They are to act, each in his little sphere, as God Himself does in His universe, and to prove in this way that God is indeed their Father. Paul likewise finds the spring of all moral action in this imitation of God ; and he declares that we are most like God when we **lead lives of love** (walk in love), making love the very atmosphere of our lives. As everywhere in Paul, the supreme expression of that divine love which must be our pattern is the Cross of Christ.

Love each other **as Christ loved you and gave himself up for you, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.** This verse is almost unique in Paul as describing the death of Christ under the figure of a sacrifice. In the epistle to the Hebrews, which has coloured a great deal of our evangelical theology, the sacrificial idea is placed at the centre. Christ is represented as the great High-Priest who was at the same time the Victim, and by his sacrifice made atonement for our sins and secured us access to God. Paul, who had given up the Jewish Law and all the ritual ideas connected with it, never thinks of the death of Christ in this manner. He conceives of it rather as the satisfaction made for sin, as the destruction which Christ effected in his own body of the hostile principle of the flesh. Even in the present verse he only speaks metaphorically. He does not ascribe a sacrificial efficacy to the Cross, but simply declares, in language borrowed from the Old Testament, that Christ's surrender of himself was well-pleasing (**fragrant**) to God. By giving himself for men Christ manifested supremely that loving will which is the will of God Himself. 2

WARNING AGAINST SENSUALITY (5 : 3–14)

Never let any sexual vice or impurity or lust be so much as 3
mentioned by you—that is the proper course for saints to
take ; no, nor indecent, silly, or scurrilous talk—all that 4
is improper. Rather, voice your thanks to God. Be sure 5

of this, that no one guilty of sexual vice or impurity or lust
(that is, an idolater) possesses any inheritance in the
6 realm of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with
specious arguments ; these are the vices that bring down
7 God's anger on the sons of disobedience. So avoid the
8 company of such men. For while once upon a time you
were darkness, now in the Lord you are light ; lead the
9 life of those who are children of the light (for the fruit
of light consists in all that is good and right and true)
10 verifying what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do
11
12 with the fruitless enterprises of the darkness ; rather
expose them. One is indeed ashamed even to speak about
13 what such men do in secret ; still, whatever the light
exposes becomes illuminated—for anything that is illu-
14 minated turns into light. Thus it is said,

'Wake up, O sleeper, and rise from the dead ;
so Christ will shine upon you.'

From the sins which promote discord Paul passes to those which corrupt and degrade. It might seem as if here for awhile he forgets his main theme of the unity of the Church, and simply warns his readers against temptations to which they were specially exposed in the midst of pagan society. But when we look deeper we can see that there is a real relation between the present section and those which have gone before. The Church, as Paul conceives of it, is God's instrument for reconciling all things. For this reason it must rid itself of all spirit of discord, but as the necessary condition to all else it must be pure. If its members are tainted with the gross heathen vices they cannot obey the high calling of God. So the passage turns on the thought that Christians have their part in the Kingdom of light. God has chosen them for His service, and they must have done with all that belongs to that world of darkness which Christ is seeking through them to destroy.

3 'But let not fornication and any uncleanness or selfish appetite be so much as named among you.' Here again we meet the curious conjunction of words denoting sexual

or sensual **vice** with the general term **lust,** usually translated 'covetousness.' As we have had occasion to note several times already, the Greek word, while it includes the special sin of avarice, has a much wider range of meaning. It stands for that attitude to life which makes one's own advantage and pleasure the sole object. Paul takes it in this sense, and thinks of it chiefly as concerned with **lust** in the special sense of bodily appetite. The impulse which leads one man to covet an undue share of this world's goods, drives another into **impurity** or sensual excess. Often the two vices, springing from the same root, are combined in the same man. Paul declares that this life of mere appetite is so alien to the very principle of the gospel that it must not be **mentioned,** even in the way of denunciation. This silence on all the baser side of things is **the proper course for** (literally, becoming to) **saints,** i.e. to people consecrated to God's service. We can see here how the earlier meaning of 'saint' began to change into the later one: those whom God had set apart were to prove by their moral behaviour that they were worthy of their calling.

Along with actual immorality Paul condemns grossness, 4 buffoonery, indecency—**indecent, silly, or scurrilous talk.** In classical Greek this last word (which in its origin meant 'versatility') was used for the finer kinds of wit. It was highly characteristic of the later age that witty, **scurrilous,** and **indecent** conversation had come to signify the same thing. Instead of these **improper** things, 'which ought not to be,' Paul exhorts his readers to thanksgiving. **Rather, voice your thanks to God.** Again he expresses himself by a play on words which cannot be reproduced in English. The term he employs would suggest to a Greek reader 'well-graced talk'—the kind of conversation befitting a gentleman. But for Christians it also meant thankfulness, and Paul wishes it to convey this meaning along with the other. The conversation of Christians ought always to have in it something of that thanksgiving which is the distinctive mood of the Christian life.

Paul has dwelt on the unseemliness of the gross pagan 5 habits. They are such that anyone with a feeling for higher things must turn away from them with disgust. But he now strikes a more solemn note : '**be sure of this, that no fornicator,** or unclean person, or sensualist (for he is an idolater) **possesses** (has) **any inheritance in the realm of Christ and of God.**' Again, as in Col. 3 : 5, **lust** or covetousness (in the wider sense of living for one's own appetites) is coupled with idolatry. This, as we saw reason to conclude, is another way of saying that the one sin is no less grave than the other. Those who serve idols instead of God, and those who live for selfish appetite (**guilty of sexual vice or impurity or lust**) are alike excluded from **the realm of Christ and of God.** This phrase is very unusual, though we meet it again in the reference to **the realm of our Lord and his Christ** in Rev. 11 : 15. For Paul, as for all the New Testament writers, the future age is the realm or Kingdom of God ; so much so that in 1 Cor. 15 : 24 he thinks of Christ as finally giving up the Kingdom to God, that God may be all in all. In that passage, however, we may discover the clue to the meaning here. In the future the realm will be God's, but Christ is now reigning as God's vice-regent. So it is declared, in effect, that neither here nor hereafter do the unclean have any part in the world of life.

6 The thought is repeated with a new emphasis. '**Let no one deceive you** with empty words ; for because of these things the wrath of God comes **on the sons of disobedience** (i.e. on those who disobey God's will). Empty words are those which are devoid of all reality—false words, **specious arguments.** In Col. 2 : 18 the term is applied to the heretical arguments, and it no doubt carries a similar meaning here. There were those who argued that the life of the body had nothing to do with the life of the spirit. A man might conduct himself as he pleased in the mere matter of the senses, so long as he was inwardly a child of God. In 1 Cor. 6 : 12 f., Paul touches on that perverted wisdom which took as its watchword, ' Meats for the belly and the belly for meats ' (i.e. the natural appetites are subject to their own laws). It reappeared in an exaggerated form in certain

sects of Gnosticism, and has been revived in a number of obscure communities down to our own time. Paul warns his readers against these false and soul-destroying heresies. God will call us to account for all things done in the body. It is indeed those **vices** or abuses of the sensual life for which we shall chiefly have to answer at the Judgment; they **bring down God's anger.**

He therefore appeals to his readers, on the ground of their 7
Christian calling, to separate themselves from the heathen vices. **Avoid the company of such men; for once upon a time** (formerly) **you were darkness, now in the Lord you are light.** Instead of saying simply 'you belong to the 8
light' he says **you are light.** Living in the light their natures ought to partake of the higher element in which they now dwell. The new nature is to manifest itself in all their conduct; **lead the life of those who are children of the light.** One is reminded of the familiar words in John 12 : 35, 36: 'Walk while you have the Light . . . that you may be sons of the light.' The two passages, however, imply two opposite thoughts, or rather the same thought is viewed from two opposite sides. According to the Fourth Gospel, the life of moral obedience is the path of true fellowship with God. Paul's thought is that since we have been brought into 9
fellowship with God through Christ we are committed to a higher moral life. This **fruit of light** consists in all goodness and justice and truth.

So far as these three qualities of the Christian man are to be distinguished they are the kindness and uprightness which he shews in his treatment of others (**all that is good and right**), and the loyalty to conscience (**true**) which he requires from himself. By this life of moral obedience we 'prove what 10
is well-pleasing to the Lord.' The thought is the same as in Rom. 12 : 2: **Be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may make out** (prove) **what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.** Or, as it is expressed in John 7 : 17: 'If any man will do the will he shall know of the doctrine.' We are to find out God's will by doing it. According as we try to obey Him we learn to **verify what**

pleases the Lord, to distinguish between what is pleasing to Him and what is not.

11 'And do not participate in the unfruitful works of darkness.' Paul has just spoken of the **fruit of light,** by which he implies that the nature of right living is to produce some genuine result. The good act may at the moment seem thrown away, but we may be sure that it has life in it and cannot perish. Evil, on the other hand, is barren; by its very nature it can only destroy. So instead of sharing in **the fruitless enterprises of the darkness—have nothing to do with** them—the Christian must **rather expose them.** This word, as we find it in the New Testament, usually means 'rebuke'; here it signifies 'rebuke by exposing.' As a rule, when we speak of exposing an evil we think of denouncing it, as loudly and publicly as we can. Paul's idea is that of a silent process, comparable to the action of light. The Christian is to order his own conduct according to God's will. By living a life which is unquestionably pure and right he will reveal the heathen vices as they really are, and this will be the most effective way of 'rebuking' them.

The thought is followed out in the verses that follow.
12 'For the things which are done by them in secret it is base even to speak of.' **One is indeed ashamed even to speak about what such men do in secret.** Still pursuing his contrast of darkness and light Paul dwells on the secrecy of the heathen vices. The rule always holds good that 'everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds be reproved' or **exposed** (John 3 : 20). One of the effects of a Christian life is to dissipate this veil of secrecy which is thrown over evil. A life in which everything is open and honest will make men feel how different it is from
13 those other lives which need to be carefully disguised. 'All things that are exposed by the light are made manifest.' Under the action of light there can be no secrecy. Things that have hitherto remained hidden are **illuminated,** suddenly laid bare, and shewn up in all their ugliness. This, Paul says, will be the result of the light thrown on heathenism by true Christian behaviour. The old vices can no longer

be concealed. By contrast with this other life they stand exposed, and those who practise them will be put to shame. 'For everything that is manifested is light.' This short sentence is very difficult. Some would take it to mean, 'all that is manifested is brought to light,' but a platitude like this would not have been worth stating. This objection is partly removed by taking the reference to light in an emphatic sense: 'whatever is manifested becomes transparent'—the light shines right through it so that no disguise is now possible. But the most satisfactory meaning is that indicated in Moffatt's translation: **anything that is illuminated** (everything that has light thrown on it) **turns into** (is changed into the nature of) **light.**

From the idea that what is illuminated is exposed in its true character Paul goes on to suggest that it may be changed into something better. The effect of Christian lives in a pagan community will be first to shame and then insensibly to purify it. Whatever the light shines on it must, in the end, transform. This interpretation seems to be borne out by the verse which follows. **Thus it is said, 'Wake up, O sleeper,** 14
and rise from the dead; so Christ will shine upon you.' Those who are exposed to Christ's influence come to share in his nature. However sunk they are in heathen wickedness they undergo a change; the light that shines on them brings them into affinity with light. Paul himself marks the words as a quotation, which will be familiar to his readers. What is the source he quotes from? The formula **it is said** (or, he says) usually introduces a text of scripture, but the words in question are not to be found anywhere in the Old Testament nor yet in the later apocalyptic books which are sometimes quoted as inspired writings. Indeed, they are obviously of Christian origin, and in view of their lyrical form they must be part of a poem. We may regard them, almost certainly, as belonging to an early Christian hymn, of which everything is now lost except this beautiful verse.

In Col. 3 : 16 and in ver. 19 of the present chapter Paul refers to the spiritual songs which seem to have played a great part in Christian worship. Most of them would be of little value, but now and then there would be one that impressed itself on the memory and passed into general use. It has been conjectured that the hymn quoted here was sung in connexion with baptism. For this reason Paul could take for granted that everyone would know it, and also that it would carry associations of a peculiarly solemn kind. The convert, rising from the water in which he has washed away his sins, is welcome into the new life. Christ will henceforth shine upon him and renew him.

GENERAL EXHORTATIONS (5 : 15–20)

15 **Be strictly[1] careful then about the life you lead ; act like**
16 **sensible men, not like thoughtless ; make the very most**
17 **of your time, for these are evil days. So do not be senseless,**
18 **but understand what is the Lord's will ; and do not**
get drunk with wine—that means profligacy—but be
19 **filled with the Spirit, converse with one another in the**
music of psalms, in hymns, and in songs of the spiritual
20 **life, praise the Lord heartily with words and music, and**
render thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord
Jesus Christ at all times and for all things.

Paul has warned his readers to separate themselves from the vicious society around them and lead the life which is required of Christ's servants. He now tells them more particularly what this life must be, reminding them at the same time that they are living in momentous days, when the return of Christ is immediately at hand.

15 ‘**Be strictly careful, then, about the life you lead**, not as
unwise men but as wise or **sensible men.**’ Wisdom is necessary
because of the tremendous interests which are now at
stake. The thought in Paul's mind is much the same as
that in the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. Only
the most **thoughtless** and careless will neglect to provide them-
16 selves now, when the great day is so near. The injunction is
repeated from Col. 4 : 5 : ‘ Making the very most of the time.’
As was noted in connexion with that passage, the idea is not

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[1] Reading ἀκριβῶς πῶς with ℵ*, B, Origen, etc.

the merely general one of using every moment of time to the best advantage. The Greek word points to a time of crisis, and is frequently used in the New Testament of the solemn interval between the departure of Christ and his return. That this is the reference here seems to be plainly indicated by the addition of the words **for these are evil days.** It was the common apocalyptic belief that just before the Messiah appeared to bring in the Kingdom of God there would be a period of crisis. All calamities would come to a head; the powers of evil would collect their whole strength for a final effort to defeat God's counsels. The belief is reflected in the brief apocalypse embodied in Mark 13. It underlies the book of Revelation, where the writer finds encouragement for the Church in the disastrous events which are happening or about to happen. Things have now come to their very worst, and this is the sign that deliverance is just at hand. A similar idea may be traced in 1 John 2 : 18 f.

Paul is likewise impressed with the desperate conditions which he sees around him, and believes that the Lord must presently come to judge the world. Only a little time of respite is now left, and every moment of it is precious. So 17
do not be senseless, but understand what is the Lord's will. In view of the crucial importance of the time in which they are living they must keep all their senses awake, so as to perceive on every occasion what God would have them do. It is worth while to note Paul's conception of intelligence as the power of discerning not the safe or advantageous course
but that which is in accordance with God's will. The demand 18
for this higher intelligence gives point to the warning which follows: **do not get drunk with wine—that means profligacy (mere debauchery)—but be full in the Spirit.** At first sight this warning against drunkenness may seem to come in abruptly, without much relevance to the general drift of the passage. But its object is to contrast the true elevation of the soul, which gives insight into the will of God, with all base imitations of it.

In ancient religions a high value was placed on the ecstatic mood. It was believed that no true approach to God was possible unless men were caught out of themselves, and the chief aim of religious rites was to produce this condition of rapture. Dances and exciting music were employed for this purpose, and the most obvious method of all was intoxication. It was in connexion with the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine, that Greek religion found its highest expression. Paul recognizes the truth of this belief that to have fellowship with God men must attain to the mood of joy and enthusiasm, but he says that mere drunkenness is the very reverse of this mood. All that sensual excess can possibly result in is the debasing of body and soul. Instead of intoxicating themselves with wine, men are to seek fulness in the Spirit. The force of the words is lost when we translate them in the usual manner, 'be full of the Spirit'; the thought is rather 'find your overflow of soul in the rapture which the Spirit will give you.' Possessed or **filled with the Spirit**, a man is truly lifted out of himself. He rises into that higher mood in which he can commune with God and understand His will.

19 The nature of this spiritual mood is described in language repeated from Col. 3 : 16: 'Speaking to one another **in** psalms and hymns and spiritual songs' (A.V.). Paul has **in** mind a meeting for Christian worship, in which the song uttered by one believer, under the influence of the Spirit, would be answered, in a like strain, by another. In place of a set order of worship there was something like lyrical **converse** or conversation on the themes of the Christian life. As in Colossians Paul desires that these **songs of the spiritual life** should correspond with heartfelt emotion; 'singing
20 and making music in your heart to the Lord,' praising **the Lord heartily with words and music.**

The series of exhortations closes with the note which is always recurring in these epistles: 'render thanks at all times and for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.' This sense that all things are ordered by a heavenly Father, who is ever seeking our good, is to be the fundamental mood of the Christian life. It is to find expression in constant thanksgiving, rendered to God **in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.** It is not necessarily implied that the name of Christ is continually to be used by way of a solemn formula, although the custom arose very early in the Church of offering all prayer 'in the name of Christ.' The idea is rather that through Christ we know God as Father and are assured of His goodness. All thanksgiving therefore must be inspired by the remembrance of Christ.

RELATIONS WITHIN THE FAMILY: MARRIAGE (5:21–33)

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, 21 22
be subject to your husbands as to the Lord, for the 23
husband is the head of the wife as Christ also (though he
is the saviour of the Body) is the head of the church; as 24
the church is subject to Christ, so wives are to be subject
to their husbands in every respect. Husbands, love your 25
wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up
for her to consecrate her by cleansing her in the bath of 26
baptism as she utters her confession, in order to have the 27
church as his very own, standing before him in all her
glory, with never a spot or wrinkle or any such flaw, but
consecrated and unblemished. So ought husbands to love 28
their wives—to love them as their own bodies (he who loves
his wife loves himself). For no one ever hates his flesh; 29
no, he nourishes and cherishes it (just as Christ does the
church, for we are members of his Body).[1] *Therefore shall* **30 31**
a man leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, and
the pair shall be one flesh. **This is a profound symbol, I 32**
mean as regards Christ and the church. However, let 33
every man of you love his wife as himself, and let the
wife reverence her husband.

In the Colossian epistle (3:18–4:1) Paul laid down a number of directions, intended to ensure that the Christian spirit should be carried into all domestic relations. The passage in Colossians has little connexion with the epistle as a whole, and perhaps was suggested to Paul by the case of Onesimus, which was occupying his mind at the time he wrote. In Ephesians, however, the section has a direct bearing on the main theme. It is God's eternal purpose to reconcile all things in Christ, and the Church is the instrument through which the work of reconciliation is to be fulfilled. Since this is the task to which God has appointed it the Church must be completely at harmony within itself. All the previous exhortations have aimed at shewing how this unity within the Church is to be attained. From the Church as a whole Paul now turns to the separate family groups of which it is composed. In this life of the family the work of unifying the Church must begin. Everything else is only the carrying out on a wider scale of what is begun in the home. Thus, while he is laying down a series of practical directions for everyday duties Paul writes with peculiar solemnity. He feels (especially in the discussion of marriage) that these ordinary relationships have a far-reaching significance. They help us to understand the 'great mystery,' and are themselves to be understood in the light of it.

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[1] Omitting [ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων αὐτοῦ] with ℵ*, A B, Origen, etc.

21 **Be subject to one another out of reverence for** (literally, in the fear of) **Christ.** These words are usually taken as the conclusion of the previous passage, but they serve most naturally as the introduction to that which follows. Before he enters on his discussion of how Christians should conduct themselves in the various relations of life he states the general principle by which they must be guided. Their attitude to one another is to be one of mutual service. They are all to regard themselves as servants of one Master, whose interests must be dearer to them than their own. The fear of Christ is to keep them helpful and considerate to each other.

As in Colossians the first relation dealt with is that of husbands and wives. The two short verses in Col. (3 : 18, 19) are now expanded, and are made the basis for mystical reflection. To understand why so great a place is given in this epistle to the discussion of marriage we need to remember a peculiar conception which prevails in many ancient religions, especially in religions of the Semitic type. The relation between a god and his people was represented as one of marriage. Originally it was the land in which he was worshipped that was married to the god, but the relation was extended from the land to the people. Thus in the Old Testament Jahveh is frequently imagined as the husband of Israel. With the prophets the crude primitive conception became a purely figurative one, but in this form it is maintained, and appears in many striking pictures of national apostasy. Hosea, for example, thinks of Israel as an unfaithful wife who is still beloved by her husband and is forgiven and restored. Paul takes up the Old Testament idea and conceives of the relation between the Church and Christ as one of marriage. The conception, so far as we know, was first introduced by Paul, but henceforth became a favourite one in Christian thought. The book of Revelation culminates in the glowing description of the Church as the Bride of Christ, and in the period subsequent to the New Testament this imagery was further developed, and gave rise to a well-marked type of mysticism which is reflected in many of our hymns. Symbolical meanings were now read into the language of the Song of Solomon, which was accepted as a devotional book, foreshadowing the relation between Christ and the Church.

Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord. At 22
the very outset Paul indicates the idea which is to guide him in the discussion. Christian marriage is to be based on the pattern of Christ's relation to his people. The submission of a wife to her husband is in some way to represent the obedience which the Church owes to Christ. This idea is
further defined in the difficult words that follow: '**for the** 23
husband is the head of the wife as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself saviour of the Body.' A similar account of the relation of husband and wife is found in 1 Cor. 11:3: **The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man.** There, however, the thought is simply that the authority of the husband over the wife is subject to the obedience which he himself owes to Christ. Here a peculiar meaning is read into the conception. Christ **is the head of the church,** not merely in the sense that he exercises authority over it, but inasmuch as he is the centre

of all the vital forces which distribute themselves through the body. In the light of this conception Paul seeks to explain the significance of marriage. He is not, as is commonly supposed, asserting the old Oriental view that absolute submission to her husband is for a wife the supreme religious duty. He is rather feeling his way towards a new understanding of marriage, in accordance with the inner principles of Christianity. Between husband and wife there should be a complete harmony, answering to that of Christ and the Church. The life of Christ reproduces itself in the Church, just as the life of the head pervades the body. In like manner husband and wife are to be one—not only 'one flesh,' but united in the same life. This idea is also involved in the reference to Christ as **the saviour of the Body.** As the Head, Christ protects the body, and is thinking continually of its welfare; and the husband stands in the same relation to the wife. The authority he possesses is not to be a selfish one, but has no other purpose than to ensure the welfare of the wife, who is indissolubly one with him.

It must be noted that in this verse the word **saviour** is not to be understood in the meaning we attach to it when we speak of Christ as 'Saviour.' This title of Christ (now perhaps more often used than any other) is practically absent from the New Testament, and seems to have come in at a later time from Hellenistic religion. To avoid all ambiguity it might be well to translate in the present verse 'himself being the preserver of the Body'—sovereign over it for the purpose of guarding and supporting it. The relation of the Church to Christ is thus one of submission arising from perfect
24 union and sympathy; and **as the church is subject to Christ, so wives are to be subject to their husbands in every respect.** A verb is used which carries with it the idea of willing submission. The Church puts itself under the control of Christ, and in the ideal marriage the will of the wife is perfectly at one with that of the husband.

25 As in Colossians Paul insists on reciprocity in all family relations. From the wives he turns to the husbands and bids them **love your wives just as Christ loved the church and**

gave himself up for her. As the bond between Christ and the Church was made the pattern for the wife's duty, so it is now for the husband's. It has often been objected to Paul's regulations on marriage that he seems to lay all stress on the husband's authority in a manner that somewhat jars with modern sentiment. But the authority which he claims for the husband is one that rests on love and sacrifice, and which indeed has no other basis.

In his thought of Christ as the great exemplar of that spirit of sacrifice which alone gives title to authority, Paul forgets his immediate theme. The two verses which follow refer solely to the union of Christ and the Church—a union made possible by the death of Christ. Christ '**gave himself** 26 for the Church **to consecrate her by cleansing her in the bath of** water along with the word.' He 'consecrated' the Church in the sense that he has set it apart as a holy community, devoted to God's service. In the farewell prayer in the Fourth Gospel (John 17 : 15–19) Christ is likewise described as consecrating the Church through his death. Here, however, the death is conceived of as effecting this consecration **in the bath** (i.e. by means of the rite) **of baptism.** In this rite, according to the view which Paul sets forth in Rom. 6 : 3 ff., the convert participates in the death of Christ, dies along with him, and rises into a new life. The Church as a whole is described in the present passage as undergoing baptism at the hands of Christ. It was personified in the previous verse as the Bride of Christ, and this Bride is now pictured as submitting to the rite which was ordained for each individual Christian. The rite consists of 'the bath of water accompanied with the word.' There is an evident reference to some solemn utterance which formed part of the baptismal ceremony and made it fully valid (**as she utters her confession**).

In our ignorance of early Christian custom it is difficult to say what utterance Paul has in mind. Perhaps he alludes to the formula, 'in the name of Jesus,' which was pronounced over the convert. Perhaps he thinks of the confession, 'Jesus is Lord,' which the convert was required to make before his immersion or immediately afterwards. In 1 Pet. 3 : 21 there is a similar reference to the spoken words which accompanied the rite : 'the answer of a good conscience towards God' (A.V.). Some question as to his faith was apparently put to the candidate for baptism, who was admitted to the ordinance when his answer was approved. Out of this confession made at baptism the so-called 'Apostles' Creed' seems to have arisen. Whatever may be the precise nature of the allusion, the present verse is highly important as shewing that baptism in the early days was much more than an external rite. The ceremony itself meant nothing apart from the 'word' or **confession** which gave expression to a vital faith.

27 Christ in his own Person is conceived as presiding at baptism 'that he might present the church to himself in her glory, not having blemish or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and irreproachable.' It has often been held that Paul is here carrying out the imagery of a marriage. Baptism corresponds to the ceremonial bath, after which the bride is splendidly arrayed (**in all her glory**) and presented to the bridegroom. It is doubtful whether Paul's language ought to be pressed in this somewhat artificial manner. For the moment he has turned away from the marriage idea, and is thinking simply of the purification of the Church by baptism. If there is any metaphor it is contained in the words 'himself to himself.' In ordinary baptism all is done by the celebrant, who presents the converts to Christ. Paul thinks of a baptism which is administered by Christ in his own Person (**in order to have the church as his very own**). Taking the whole Church under his protection, he purifies it to make it worthy of him (**standing before him, with never a spot or wrinkle or any such flaw**), and presents it to himself.

28 The digression has prepared the way to a profounder view
29 of the duties involved in marriage. With a love resembling that which Christ bears to the Church, **ought husbands to love their wives as their own bodies (he who loves his wife loves himself). For no one ever hates his flesh.** At first sight it might seem as if Paul here put the love of a

husband to his wife on rather a low ground. Taking literally the scriptural statement that man and wife become **one flesh**, he regards love to one's wife as a mere extension of self-love. Just as a man is careful of his own skin, nourishing and cherishing it, he needs to take due care of his wife, who is almost equally necessary to his health and comfort. But to interpret Paul in this manner is to overlook the fact that he is speaking figuratively. His real thought is that the union in marriage is like that of Christ and the Church. Christ is related to the Church as the head is to the body, and the relation of man and wife ought to be just as close. In other words, the whole point is that union in marriage must not be based on physical and material but on spiritual conditions. It ought in some manner to reflect the divine love and be grounded in it. This thought is made explicit in the words that follow: **as Christ does the church, for** 30 **we are members of his Body.** Individual Christians belong to the Church, the body which is united with Christ as head, and which is the object of his love. In their relations with one another they are to manifest this love which they receive from Christ. Husbands, more particularly in their conduct towards their wives, ought to give effect to that divine love.

The passage which follows is peculiarly difficult. Paul 31 himself indicates that he is speaking in riddles, which he does not expect his readers fully to understand. All that he tries to make clear to them is that the marriage relation is a mysterious one, and that God Himself intended it to be so when He first ordained it. The words of this ordinance are first quoted. **Therefore shall a man leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the pair shall be one flesh.** In the original passage (Gen. 2 : 24) it is told how woman was formed out of man's own body, and for this reason a man must regard his wife as his own flesh. Paul makes the reason that which he has given in the previous verses: marriage typifies the supreme union between Christ and the Church, and must therefore transcend and displace all former relations in which the man and the woman have found themselves. Jesus himself makes use of the verse in Genesis to prove that marriage is indissoluble (Mark 10 : 6 ff.). In the Mosaic law it had been treated as an ordinary contract which might be set aside under given circumstances, but from this later rule, due to human imperfections, he goes back to the original purpose of marriage as set forth in the creation story. God had made man male and female, so that husband and wife should belong inseparably to one another. The permanence of the tie, in other words, is involved in the very constitution of man's nature, and no human law can presume to break it. Paul goes still further, and suggests that when God instituted marriage he intended that it should be the standing type of that relation between Christ and the Church which should afterwards be established. For this reason it was invested from the first with a peculiar sacredness.

32 He is aware that he has given a strange exposition of the scripture passage, but assures his readers that this meaning is really wrapt up in it if they were able to penetrate to its inner intention. 'This mystery is great; but I, for my part, speak with reference to Christ and the church.' By a 'mystery,' as elsewhere in these epistles, Paul means a divine purpose which is hidden from common eyes, and can only be understood in the light of the Spirit. He admits that in the present instance we have to do with a **great** mystery—one that is not only deeply hidden but is many-sided and capable of many interpretations, all of them true in their different ways. This seems to be the force of the emphatic **I, I mean.** Paul says in effect, 'Others may explain this in their own manner; I myself could offer other explanations; but I am looking at the matter now from one particular point of view. I see that the ultimate reference of the mystery is to Christ and the church.' What, then, is the 'mystery' which is thus described as 'great'? It consists, according to one view, of the whole text just quoted—'this mysterious utterance of scripture.' Or we are to look for it in the closing words of the quotation, '**the pair** (the two) shall become **one.**'

Among the fragments preserved from the lost 'Gospel according to the Egyptians,' there is a strange saying ascribed to Jesus : ' When Salome inquired when the things concerning which she asked should be known, the Lord said : When ye have trampled on the garment of shame, and when the two become one, and the male with the female is neither male nor female.' The same idea recurs in several of the apocryphal sayings ; e.g. ' the Lord said in a mystery, If ye make not the left hand as the right, and the things that are above as those that are below, and the things before as those behind, ye shall not know the Kingdom of God.' Paul may possibly be thinking of some esoteric wisdom of this kind which he read into the word of Genesis. Or perhaps we are to look for the ' mystery ' not in the words themselves but in the ordinance of which they speak. Since marriage, as we are expressly told in scripture, was instituted by God Himself, it must have a divine significance, which becomes ever deeper the more it is pondered on. Paul finds the final key to it in the relation of Christ to the Church. God ordained this union of man and woman in the marriage bond as a profound symbol, in order to foreshadow His great purpose of reuniting all things in Christ—the purpose now growing to fulfilment through the Church, the body of which Christ is head. It may be noted that it was under the influence of this verse that marriage came to be accepted by the Roman church as a sacrament. This was the more natural, as Paul's words were rendered in the Latin translation ' sacramentum hoc magnum est.'

Few things in Paul's writings have caused more perplexity than his interpretation of the meaning of marriage. At first sight his idea that it was meant to point forward to the union of Christ and the Church appears farfetched and absurd—an extreme example of the arbitrary mode of thought which he had learned in the Rabbinical schools. Yet it is possible to discern a great truth at the heart of his conception. The union of man and woman, however we look at it, is indeed a great mystery. It is the highest expression of the principle which we find everywhere at work in nature, and if we could understand fully what it means, we should possess the master-key to God's purpose in creation. Lucretius begins his great poem on 'The Nature of the World' with a splendid invocation to the power that draws male and female into union. Paul was equally conscious of the significance of this mystery, and tries to relate it to the other great mystery of the uniting of all things in Christ.

33 From his flight of speculation he returns to the practical duty which he had set himself to enforce, and which has now been invested with a far-reaching import. **However, let every man of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife reverence her husband.** The first word implies that even apart from those high considerations which have been urged the duty is clear; a man's wife should be as dear to him as himself, and the wife must not only love her husband but shew him proper obedience.

CHILDREN AND PARENTS (6 : 1–4)

1 **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right;**
2 *honour your father and mother* **(it is the first command**
3 **with a promise),** *that it may be well with you and that you*
4 *may live long on earth.* **As for you fathers, do not exasperate your children, but bring them up in** *the discipline* **and on** *the admonitions of the Lord.*

From the primary relation of marriage Paul passes, as in
1 Colossians, to the duties of children and parents. **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.** Two ideas are here combined: (1) obedience to parents is a natural duty, and is so enjoined in the Ten Commandments, which sum up the 'righteousness' which God requires of man; (2) it is also a Christian duty, and in Christianity has taken on a finer quality and a higher meaning. The implied reference to the Commandments leads Paul to comment on
2 that one which deals with filial duty. **Honour your father and mother (it is the first command with a promise).** The words might possibly be rendered, 'which is a primary commandment, accompanied with a promise'; but they are

more naturally taken as above. Of all the commandments, this is the first to which a promise is attached. It has been objected that the second commandment also carries with it a promise ('showing mercy unto thousands of those who love me'). But Paul may justly have reasoned that this is not so much a promise as a description of God's love to those who serve Him. Filial obedience is promised the definite 3
reward of well-being and long life.

As in Col. 3 : 21 Paul requires of parents that they shall 4
exercise their authority without undue harshness. **Fathers, do not exasperate** (anger) **your children, but bring them up in the discipline and on the admonitions of the Lord.** The contrast is between the nagging, bullying methods of unwise parents and the sweet reasonableness which ought to prevail in the Christian home. There must be **discipline**, but it needs to be enforced with the love and consideration which Christ inspires. The verse can hardly be construed as a warning to Christian parents to instruct their children in the facts and principles of their religion. Paul is thinking only of the temper which parents should bring to the education of their children. All the training they give, all the counsels they offer, should be imbued with the Christian spirit.

SERVANTS AND MASTERS (6 : 5-9)

Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters here below 5
with reverence and trembling, with singleness of heart as
to Christ himself ; instead of merely working when their 6
eye is on you, like those who court human favour, do
God's will from the heart like servants of Christ, by 7
rendering service with goodwill as to the Lord and Master,
not to men. Be sure that everyone, slave or free, will be 8
paid back by the Lord and Master for the good he has done.
And as for you masters act by your servants in the same 9
way, and stop threatening them ; be sure that they and
you have a Lord and Master in heaven, and there is no
partiality about him.

In the passage which follows on the duties of masters and

servants, Paul adheres closely to what he has already said in Colossians. For the most part he repeats himself literally, and expresses the same ideas even when he occasionally
5 varies the phrase. 'Servants, obey your masters after the flesh with fear and trembling.' This is an expression used several times by Paul (1 Cor. 2 : 3 ; 2 Cor. 7 : 15 ; Phil. 2 : 12). The idea attached to **reverence and trembling** is that of a keen sense of one's shortcomings, with a consequent anxiety
6 not to fall into any mistake. Thus Paul does not require of servants that they should be cringing and obsequious, but simply that they should always do their best, **with singleness of heart as to Christ himself.** It is not the anger of their masters **here below** that they must fear, but the disapproval of Christ, who is never pleased with ill-done service.

7 The idea is expanded in the three following verses, borrowed from Colossians. As in the previous epistle, the whole appeal turns on the phrase **as to the Lord** and **not to men.** Slaves are committed to hard toil for masters who own them, and whose will they are bound to obey. But in spite of all they can assert their own will. They can transform their earthly service into service for Christ, and by this means they can become free men. By thus putting their will into the service imposed on them they can secure the due recompense to their
8 labour even though men refuse it ; 'knowing this, that every man if he does anything good will receive credit for it from the Lord, whether he be slave or free.' What Christ will look to in the Judgment is simply the intrinsic worth of a man's performance, **the good he has done.** He will not consider whether it was done on a great scale or a small, under conditions of freedom or of bondage. Nothing will count except the spirit in which the work was done.

Thus Paul turns, as in Colossians, from the slaves to the masters, reminding them that they stand on the same footing
9 in the sight of the great Master. **As for you, masters, act by your servants in the same way, and stop threatening them,** i.e. act to your slaves in the same spirit of goodwill which you desire from them. The masters, no less than the slaves, are to be mindful of their higher duty and so perform the

oversight which belongs to them as the manual labour belongs to the slaves. If they so discharge their office they will be able to dispense with threatening. Fair treatment will be met with ready obedience. The motive that must control all the relation of masters and servants is emphasized once more; 'be sure that the Master—their master and yours—is in heaven, and with him there is no respect of persons.' This warning is meant both for masters and slaves. Human justice always sided with the master when there was a difference; Christ will shew no such partiality or favouritism. Neither will he acquit the wicked slave because of his lowly condition. All will be treated by one measure, according to their worth.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AS A WARFARE (6 : 10-17)

To conclude. Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of 10
his might; put on God's armour so as to be able to stand 11
against the stratagems of the devil. For we have to 12
struggle not with blood and flesh but with the angelic Rulers, the angelic Authorities, the potentates of the dark present, the spirit-forces of evil in the heavenly sphere.
So take God's armour, that you may be able to make 13
a stand upon the evil day and hold your ground by overcoming all the foe. Hold your ground, ***tighten the belt of*** 14
truth about **your** ***loins, wear integrity as your coat of mail,*** 15
and have your ***feet*** **shod** ***with the stability of the gospel*** 16
***of peace*;** **above all, take faith as your shield, to enable** 17
you to quench all the fire-tipped darts flung by the evil one, put on ***salvation as your helmet,*** **and take** ***the Spirit as*** **your** ***sword*** **(that is,** ***the word of God*****).**

As he brings the epistle to a close Paul exhorts his readers to courage and endurance in the service to which Christ has called them. He thinks of the Christian as a soldier who is engaged in a great struggle for which he must be fully armed, and the nature of his armour is described in detail. The comparison of life to a warfare is an obvious one, for which many parallels can be found in every literature. Paul himself constantly speaks of his struggles and hardships under metaphors borrowed from warfare. In the present passage, however, he imagines a warfare of a specific kind. The Christian has to take arms not merely against the world's troubles and temptations, but against a host of invisible enemies. In more than a figurative sense he is called on to do battle, for the powers of evil are striving to overcome the cause of Christ, and every Christian is in the place of a soldier, with a duty assigned to him. This thought of a warfare against spiritual foes is very real to Paul, so that the passage is hardly to be construed as mere poetical description. Luther believed that on several occasions he had actual combats with devils, and Paul likewise thought of spiritual assaults which were only to be beaten off with spiritual weapons. It is chiefly with this Christian armour that the passage is concerned. At first sight it may seem to be attached loosely to the rest of the epistle by way of a final exhortation ; but when we look at it more closely we can see that it has a real connexion with what has gone before. Again and again Paul has spoken of those enemies **in the heavenly sphere** who have sought to frustrate the work of Christ. He has described the Church as Christ's instrument in restoring all things to harmony, in spite of the hostile powers. Now, as he closes, he calls on every member of the Church to do his part valiantly in that cause for which it stands. The victory of Christ will depend on the fidelity of each one of his soldiers.

10 **To conclude** (for the rest). **Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.** Instead of further exhortations in detail Paul declares that the Christian must find strength in Christ for all the conflict of life. He proceeds to tell what this strength consists in, picturing it as a complete suit of armour. **In the Lord** is the usual Pauline term for union with Christ. By making ourselves one with him his power takes possession of us. **I am able for anything,** says Paul in Phil. 4 : 13, **in him who strengthens me.**

11 Put on the complete armour of God—not merely separate pieces but the 'panoply.' This emphatic word determines

the whole thought of the passage which follows. The enemies we contend with are strong and crafty, and we must be armed at every point if we would resist them. **God's armour** implies that the armour required is of spiritual nature, and that it is of God's own making, and therefore proof against all weapons that can be brought against it. The purpose of the armour is ' that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil ' (A.V.). As the next verse shews, Paul uses this phrase in no conventional sense. He thinks of man as surrounded by invisible enemies, with Satan as their chief. In the time of Paul the belief in spiritual agencies, evil and good, with whom man had to reckon was universal. We read constantly in the gospels of angels and demons who are active in human affairs. The religion of the age, not to speak of its magic, was largely concerned with the danger from evil spirits. Paul shared in the prevailing belief, all the more so as he thought of the work of Christ as having its background in the heavenly world. The hostile angels had conspired to prevent Christ's coming, and when he had come in spite of them they had contrived to bring about his death 1 Cor. 2 : 8). Their designs against Christ himself had failed, but now they had turned their malice against his people. Behind all the troubles and temptations by which Christians are assailed Paul saw the malignity of those invisible powers. His own ' thorn in the flesh,' whatever it may have been, was due, he believed, to a messenger of Satan who had been sent to buffet him. In their attacks on Christ's people the evil powers are not only strong but infinitely cunning ; hence the need for armour which will resist all their **stratagems.**

For we have to struggle, not with blood and flesh (i.e. 12 not against merely human foes), ' but against Dominions, against Authorities, against the World-rulers of this darkness.' Paul singles out the most august titles by which the hostile powers were known in order to impress on us the terrible nature of the struggle. Not merely spiritual agencies, but the very mightiest of them have set themselves to oppose us. Elsewhere in these epistles Paul has referred to the **angelic Rulers** or Dominions and **Authorities** ; now he adds to them the **potentates** or 'world-rulers.' In apocalyptic Judaism it was assumed that this world had been given over, for the time being, to the power of Satan. He was the Prince of this world (cf. John 12 : 31, 14 : 30, 16 : 11). Perhaps there is a suggestion of this idea in Paul's reference to the world-rulers, but the immediate origin of the term must be sought in Hellenistic speculation. The Gnostic systems made a sharp division between the upper sphere of light—the Plerôma—and the material world. This lower sphere was under the dominion of the **potentates** or 'world-rulers'—identified in some of the systems with the planets or the angelic powers enthroned in them. The soul of man, which has wandered from its true home into the lower sphere, is in bondage to these powers, and seeks, with the aid of a divine redeemer, to escape from them.

Paul's language is to be explained in the light of such conceptions. He speaks of 'the world-rulers of this darkness,' or **the potentates of the dark present,** i.e. the malign angelic beings who hold sway in the material world, the region of darkness that stands over against the divine light. These tyrannical powers, aware that Christ has offered deliverance, are for ever striving to force men back under their yoke. All the supernatural enemies against whom the Christian must wage his warfare are finally described in one comprehensive phrase as 'spiritual powers or **forces of evil in the heavenly sphere.'** The phrase is intentionally vague, so as to enhance the mystery and horror of the picture. The Christian is to conceive of himself as battling with giant foes whom he cannot see or name. Behind troubles and temptations which may seem in themselves trivial there are mighty **spirit-forces of evil,** reigning in the invisible world.

13 Wherefore—in order to meet this terrific assault—**take God's armour** (take up the whole armour of God), **that you may be able to make a stand** (literally, to withstand) **upon the evil day.** This may refer to the great crisis now at hand. It was believed, as we have already seen (5 : 16), that just before the return of Christ Satan and his host would make their last desperate attempt to recover their power. The book

of Revelation turns on the imminence of this crisis, foreshadowed by the establishment of emperor-worship, in which a human being usurped the honour due to God. A similar conviction that the Church is presently to confront the great crisis may be traced in other New Testament books (e.g. 1 John 2 : 18 ; Heb. 12 : 26). But the reference in the verse before us is more probably to be taken in a general sense ; by **the evil day** Paul means any evil day, any time of peculiar stress and difficulty. He is thinking throughout the passage of a condition of soul which must always be that of the Christian. Now and then, as in the life of a soldier, there will be a day of battle, a trial which will challenge a man's utmost fortitude. The Christian will be able to meet it because at all times he is fully armed.

It is not altogether certain how the next words should be translated. The meaning may be (1) 'having made all your preparations,' i.e. having put on every piece of the armour which is now to be described ; or (2) 'having overcome all things.' The image would thus be that of a warrior who at the close of the struggle holds the ground as victor, **by overcoming all the foe.** This is the view accepted in Moffatt's translation, but it does not seem entirely adequate. Paul is speaking of a panoply which will enable the Christian both to 'withstand' and to 'stand.' There would be no need of armour after the fight was won. So it is best to translate (as in the A.V.) 'having done all to stand.' This expresses an idea which is not only fine in itself but fits in admirably with the general sense of the passage. Paul imagines a desperate conflict in which the soldier performs his duty to the uttermost, and still holds on when his cause seems hopeless. The Christian, likewise, is to stand at his post, when he can do no more.

The armour is now described in detail. If Paul wrote the epistle in the military quarter of Rome, with the spectacle of soldiers marching or standing at guard always before his eyes, the picture may owe something to his own observation. For the most part, however, he falls back on the imagery of scripture. He borrows chiefly from Isa. 59 : 17—a magnificent passage in which the prophet thinks of God as arming Himself to come to the rescue of His people. One or two suggestions are also taken from the messianic prophecy in Isa. 11 : 4. The Old Testament language had already been reproduced in the Wisdom of Solomon 5 : 18, and this passage may also have been in Paul's mind; elsewhere in his epistles (particularly in the first two chapters of Romans) he seems to shew a pretty close acquaintance with this book, and its influence is traceable here.

14 **Hold your ground** (stand fast), **tighten the belt of truth about your loins** (literally, with your loins girt about with truth). The object of a belt or girdle was to hold the clothes well together and prevent them from interfering with active movement, and in this sense **truth** (i.e. perfect sincerity in word and deed) is compared to a girdle. It holds together all other qualities and makes them effectual. 'The longer I live,' said Charles Dickens, 'the more I find that without sincerity a man can do nothing.' In the passage of Isaiah which Paul is following, the divine warrior 'puts on righteousness as a breast-plate.' The prophet seems to intend little more than that God is the God of righteousness, and will fight for those who have suffered wrong. Paul transfers the Old Testament phrase to the Christian armour, and thereby gives it another and more definite meaning. As the purpose of a breast-plate or **coat of mail** is to guard the vital parts of the body, so the Christian protects himself by **integrity** or uprightness. The thought is similar to that of the famous Ode of Horace, 'Integer vitae scelerisque purus.' A man whose life is perfectly upright has nothing to fear.

15 One of the most important parts of the Roman equipment was the 'caligae'—the military boots which were designed for long marches over every kind of difficult ground. It has been said that the secret of the Roman conquests was the attention bestowed on the soldier's boots. So Paul is careful to bring in this part of the armour. **Have your feet shod with the stability of the gospel of peace.** The precise meaning of the metaphor is somewhat doubtful. The Greek word may imply that in the strength of the gospel the

believer is prepared for all difficulties, however unexpected. He has **stability** ; his footing is sure, and on the most slippery ground he will not fall. Paul is evidently thinking, however, of the prophetic passage about 'the feet of him that brings good tidings' (Isa. 52 : 7), and his words may thus be taken to refer to the missionary spirit, the preparedness or readiness to carry the gospel everywhere. As the soldier had to be fit to march instantly at the word of command, so the Christian must be prepared, at all times, to answer the call of Christ. We are apt to think of the amazing progress of Christianity in the early centuries as due to the work of Paul and a few other great missionaries. The truth is that they did comparatively little. During the great age of expansion which followed the death of Paul we do not hear of the name of a single outstanding missionary. The real work was done by countless obscure men and women who made it their first duty to spread the message in their own circle of friends and neighbours. Along with the obligation to follow the gospel in one's own life Paul dwells on this other obligation to make it known.

From the constant dress of the soldier Paul passes to his 16 special equipment for battle. **Above all** (i.e. 'to cover all the rest,' or perhaps, 'along with all these'), **take faith as your shield** (literally, the shield of faith), **to enable you to quench all the fire-tipped darts flung by the evil one.** A peculiar word is used which signifies an oblong **shield**, designed to protect the whole body, and made of wood, covered over with thick hide. Arrows and javelins stuck in the hide, and even when they were loaded with burning pitch could not set it on fire. Faith is compared to such a shield, guarding the believer from head to foot against all the attacks of his invisible enemies.

With another reminiscence of Isaiah Paul speaks of **salvation** 17 **as the helmet.** This means for Isaiah, as he describes the divine warrior, that God is the bringer of salvation. His people see His flaming crest in the distance, and know that He is hastening to save them. As Paul uses the image, it applies to a salvation which the believer has received. Two things are suggested by comparing it to a helmet: (1) The Christian in his struggle wears, as his chief glory, the confidence of his salvation; (2) this confidence is at the same time his protection. It may be said that Paul here throws into a vivid image the thought which inspires the great closing passage of the eighth chapter of Romans. **If God be for us, who can be against us?** Such, then, is the panoply in which the Christian stands completely defended. Only one thing more is needed—the weapon with which he himself may assail his foes: 'the sword of the Spirit, that is, the word of God. The reference is not to the Bible, the Word spoken by God. As the context shews, Paul conceives rather of the Christian as speaking, answering his enemies with words he has received from God. **Take the Spirit as your sword (that is, the word of God).** From the next verse we may infer that while Paul includes all forms of Christian utterance (e.g. the confession of faith, the declaration of God's promises, etc.) he thinks chiefly of prayer. It is called the sword of the Spirit because the Spirit accompanies it and gives it force. **We know not how to pray aright, but the Spirit pleads for us** (Rom. 8:26). The imagery reminds us of the well-known verse in the epistle to Hebrews: 'For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword' (Heb. 4:12).

REQUEST FOR PRAYER, ESPECIALLY ON HIS OWN BEHALF (6:18–20)

18 **Praying at all times in the Spirit with all manner of prayer and entreaty—be alive to that, attend to it unceasingly, interceding on behalf of all the saints and on my behalf**
19 **also, that I may be allowed to speak and open my lips in order to expound fully and freely that open secret of**
20 **the gospel for the sake of which I am in custody as its envoy. Pray that I may have freedom to declare it as I should.**

As in all his epistles, Paul closes with a personal section. He is writing in the present instance to a church (or churches) which he has never visited, and of which he probably knows very little. He is unable, therefore, to single out any of his readers by name, and can only send general good wishes and a few allusions to his own circumstances and prospects. The transition to these closing sentences of personal greeting is very skilfully made. After his reference to the sword of the Spirit he speaks explicitly of prayer, and exhorts his readers to pray for each other and for himself. The personal notices then follow naturally.

Praying at all times (on every occasion) **in the Spirit with all** 18 **manner of prayer and entreaty.** So far he thinks of prayer for their own welfare and spiritual guidance, but he then goes on to exhort them to pray for others: ‘they are to keep wakeful for that purpose with all insistence and supplication for all the saints.’ As often in the New Testament, the idea of watchfulness is coupled with that of prayer. The habit of prayer easily becomes a mechanical one, performed without any thought at all; yet its whole value depends on the earnest desire behind the spoken words. **Be alive to that,** or ‘for this purpose’; i.e. to preserve this living quality in our prayer we are to accustom ourselves to pray for others—**interceding on behalf of all the saints.** A great preacher has observed that, however listless a congregation may be during the stated prayer, it always wakens when prayer is being made for the sick, the bereaved, loved ones who are far away or in danger. This remembrance of others, in public or private devotions, is the surest way of kindling the true spirit of prayer. Like Jesus himself, in his parables of the importunate widow and the traveller at midnight, Paul requires that prayer should be insistent: **attend to it unceasingly**; not that God hears us for our much speaking, but because insistency, even when the prayer seems not to be answered, is evidence of a faith that will not allow itself to be discouraged.

So he comes to his request for prayer **on my behalf also,** 19 ‘that a message may be given me in the opening of my mouth.’ In Col. 4 : 3 he spoke of prayer that a door might be opened for the entrance of the gospel. Here the prayer is that his own mouth should be opened, **that I may be allowed to speak and open my lips.** He is concerned not so much that others should be willing to listen as that he himself may have power **to expound fully and freely** (to make known boldly) **the open secret**, or mystery, **of the gospel.** Now at the close of the epistle he takes occasion to remind them of its main theme. He has been seeking to impress on them the inner significance of the gospel, the hidden purpose of God which lies behind it. He desires that in all his teaching he may be able to **expound** these high matters boldly. This adverb, ' boldly ' or **fully and freely**, corresponds to a Greek word which means literally ' freedom of speech,' and perhaps it is intended here to suggest this idea as well as the larger one of boldness in general.

20 For the sake of the gospel Paul declared himself to be an envoy or ambassador **in custody** (bonds). This phrase would have a particular vividness and fitness if the epistle was written from Rome—the imperial city to which envoys or anbassadors were constantly coming from all nations on earth. Paul could feel in his prison that he also was there on a high errand, acting as Christ's ambassador. But we know from 2 Cor. 5 : 20 that the thought of his being an **envoy** was a favourite one with Paul, long before he arrived at Rome. He says here that he is still carrying on his appointed work, although he must now do so in chains.

THE MESSENGER TYCHICUS (6 : 21–22)

21 Our beloved brother Tychicus, a faithful minister in the Lord,
will give you all information about me, so that you may
22 know how I am ; that is why I am sending him to you,
to let you know how I am and to encourage your hearts.

21 The next two verses are practically repeated from Col.
22 4 : 7–9. Paul may be indicating this when he says **that you** also **may know how I am**, i.e. the news of me ; you as well as others to whom I am writing.

THE CLOSING BENEDICTION (6 : 23, 24)

**Peace and love with faith be to the brothers from God the 23
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who 24
have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Peace be to the brothers and love with faith from God the 23
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We can here discern the triad which is always recurring in Paul: faith, hope, love. It is most explicit in the great thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, but we can trace it constantly throughout the epistles. In the present verse we have **peace** substituted for hope, no doubt because Paul is now closing his letter, and wishes to bring in the customary word of farewell. He ends with
the usual benediction: 'Grace be with all who love our 24
Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption.' This last word was frequently employed in Hellenistic thought to denote the divine nature—exempt from change and decay—as distinguished from the earthly. It occurs a number of times in Paul's writings, usually with reference to immortality (e.g. 1 Cor. 15 : 42 : 'It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption').

In the verse before us, the closing phrase may possibly define **our Lord Jesus Christ** as now exalted and dwelling in the immortal sphere. But it connects more naturally with the verb. Paul means to suggest that even on earth Christ's people possess the higher nature, and that all their thoughts and emotions ought to spring out of the new life that is in them. Their love to Christ is that of men who have been reborn through him, **an undying** or incorruptible **love.** We cannot but feel that Paul deliberately chooses this word to close the epistle. He began with praise to God who blessed **us in the heavenly sphere in Christ** (1 : 3). He closes with the thought that those who love Christ have already their part in that higher immortal world in which he dwells.

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